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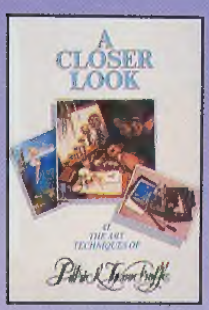

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WORD BALLOONS

Toon Times

In my home, in my office, in my life, there are countless Toons. They're all over the place. A statuesque Snow White leads all Seven Dwarfs—even my namesake Dopey—across the bookcase, off to see the ceramic Popeye mug. The Bullwinkle videos wait to pull a rabbit out of a hat under the TV. And forever frozen in pursuit, as PVC figures on my desk, the Road Runner (for a change) chases the Coyote.

Maybe I'm seeing Toons everywhere because they *are* everywhere. We're in the middle of an animation renaissance spurred by one success after another in the movies (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit, The Little Mermaid*), TV (*DuckTales, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, The Simpsons, Tiny Toon Adventures*), in video releases (*Bullwinkle & Rocky*) and in merchandising.

As a result, animated stuff is abundant. Movie studios that haven't made animated features in years are suddenly back in the game; 20th Century Fox has two environmentally-themed films (*The Endangered, FernGully: The Last Rainforest*) while Paramount is producing Ralph Bakshi's ambitious live action/animated *Cool World*. The networks have more primetime Toons planned—say, "Thank you, *Simpsons*"—in *Capitol Critters, Fish Police* (adapted from the comic) and Tim Burton's *Family Dog*. There are tons more cartoon shows—for Saturday morning (*Pirates of Dark Water, Yo Yogi*), for syndication (*Bucky O'Hare, James Bond Jr.*), for the Fox Network (*Batman*), for cable (a trio for Nickelodeon).

There's *so much* animation—and, Sturgeon's Law notwithstanding, a great deal more of it than you might expect seems to be good.

Which brings us to this issue, a special animated edition. Yes, we did ponder covering animation and nothing but this issue; however, that would have probably driven the comic book purists among our readers *Looney Tunes*, so we reached a happy medium.

First, there's history—Michael Mallory's intriguing look at Warner Bros.' third man, director Robert McKimson (page 14). Always overshadowed in the past by the legends (and genius) of Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Tex Avery and Bob Clampett, McKimson was one of animation's (comparatively) unsung heroes. His creations live on as Speedy Gonzales, Foghorn Leghorn and the Tasmanian Devil continue to provide laughs.

Taz now headlines his own new series (page 9), a position quite appropriate for a character who has emerged as an unexpected licensing star.

Adaptations are big this fall with *Back to the Future, Mother Goose & Grimm* and *Little Shop of Horrors* hitting Saturday mornings and an animated *Prince Valiant* fighting for justice on the Family Channel. On page 38, you'll find another great adventurer, Hergé's *Tintin*, as he's readied for a Nelvana cartoon version to air, like Nelvana's *Babar* series, on HBO.

This issue, you'll also meet the terror that flaps by night, *Darkwing Duck* (page 33). This ubiquitous fowl, his creators maintain, is more than just a *Batman* parody, but a take on the whole vigilante hero tradition (The Shadow, Green Hornet, etc.). *Darkwing* can be seen everywhere—in a new limited comic book series from Disney Comics as well as in syndicated, ABC Saturday morning and Disney Channel broadcasts.

November will bring two new animated features: *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West* from Steven Spielberg's London Amblimation Studio (which David Hutchison toured as one of the first journalists to see this innovative animation facility, see page 45) and Disney's *Beauty & the Beast*. Glen Keane, one of Disney's quintessential animators, previews that spectacular fantasy on page 25. And spectacular it is!

Along with other NY-based members of the entertainment press, Hutch and I have already seen a version of *Beauty & the Beast* (the whole film, though sequences were variously in pencil test/storyboard/finished animation) and it looks fabulous. It's a truly exciting adventure—with great songs (by *Little Mermaid*'s Alan Menken & Howard Ashman), powerful animation (by Keane, James Baxter on Belle, Andreas Deja on Gaston) and wonderful voice work (from Paige O'Hara, Richard White, Angela Lansbury, David Ogden Stiers, Jerry Orbach). We can't wait for the finished film.

These are great times for Toons. And the future looks even Toonier.

—David McDonnell/Editor

LETTERING

Personal replies are **impossible**. Other fans & advertisers may contact readers whose letters are printed here. To **avoid** this, mark your letter "Please Withhold My Address." Otherwise, we retain the option to publish it. Write:
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...Having just seen *The Rocketeer*, I have a few comments to make. The movie was fun, entertaining and, to use the hero's own phrase, "I like it!" All in all, I enjoyed myself in this delightful film, but something struck me as odd. In the original graphic novel, the rocket pack was built by Clark "Doc" Savage—a well-known and respected scientist of the 1930s. The rocket pack is certainly the type of item Doc Savage would have worked on—even the gyro-plane used in the film was of Doc's many experiments—but Howard Hughes was credited with the device's creation.

Could it be Disney didn't want to use the popular scientist/adventurer of the 1930s -40s pulp magazines in *The Rocketeer*, because director George Pal had made a mockery of him in his 1975 movie, *Doc Savage: The Man of Bronze*. Thanks to our Pal, Doc Savage is being shunned from further screen adventures (though there are rumors of a new film based off the original pulp novel floating about). If taken seriously, Doc Savage could be a great screen figure.

My other comment concerns the musical score. Though James Horner is slowly learning how to write original music, he still tends to "fall back" on "filler" phrases of music he has used before. In practically every score he has done, you can find parts of music he wrote years ago. I wish he would give it up and give us a *totally* original score without using his old stuff. I like his music, but would like to hear what else he can do.

Ted R Blasingame
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As we understand it, Hughes' involvement was revealed by Rocketeer *creator Dave Stevens. Maybe Hughes and Doc Savage, two great men of their time, worked together? Speaking of Doc, check out Millennium's new comic series and Bantam's latest paperback releases. Just out is* Escape from Loki, *the first new Savage saga in almost 50 years. It's by Hugo-winner (and Doc biographer) Philip José Farmer and relates how Savage met his fellow adventurers in WWI. A series of all-new Savage novels—written by COMICS SCENE's Will Murray—follows. Look for* Python Isle, *out this month.*

...Being a Tooniac, I feel that I must defend *Tiny Toons*. I was shocked, and dare I say outraged, at Laura Martinez's letter in COMICS SCENE #19.

Her attempt to debase and debunk the *Tiny Toons* phenomenon was pathetic at best. She states that the series (65 episodes already on the air and in syndication with more on the way) is not up to par and pales in comparison with Disney. This she concludes after watching the first week! That's *five* shows, people. How can anyone make a judgment on an entire series after watching a mere seven or eight percent?

Now as to their stories being too simplistic and too funny, that's what Warner Bros. animation department was founded on. They were to counter the "realistic" and "fairy-tale-like" cartoons of Disney. Warners wished to produce funny shorts, not long, drawn-out, realistic "cartoons." And I put the word "cartoons" in quotes because what Disney tried to do was make live-action movies with drawings instead of actors. His goal was to bring animation to the point where you couldn't tell it was animated.

What Warners and even MGM (with Tex Avery, especially) did was use the idea of animation and make it funny by showing it was animation. Notice the stretches and squashes and "Clampettian Distortions" in Warner Bros. cartoons.

Are *Tiny Toons* more imaginative than Disney cartoons? Yes! Look at Disney's latest "imaginative" concept: *TaleSpin*. What did they do? They used characters from an old movie. *Tiny Toons*, while based on the original Looney Tunes cast, has added new characters and fooled around with the existing ones' characteristics to produce new Toons.

And as for *TMNT* being better: Have you seen *Darkwing Duck*? Canned soundtrack, freeze animation, simplistic coloring, flat characters.

Augie De Blieck Jr.
North Haledon, NJ

...I have purchased COMICS SCENE regularly, since its first issue. I must compliment your team on such an intelligent, informative and fun magazine. In England, comic books and related films, toys and TV shows are not as widely accepted as in the States. As a longtime collector of comics, I am glad to say that now in England there are many shops catering to the true collectors where I can often find some toys and model kits based on famous comic book characters. The Horizon kits that you featured so beautifully in CS SPECTACULAR #4 are very popular but nowhere near as popular, or collectible as the classic Aurora kits of the 1960s which re-created so many of our favorite heroes. These kits, along with Mego's range of DC and Marvel character dolls, would make for some very interesting articles. Also, how about an article on Ideal Toys' Captain Action, who actually had a comic of his own for awhile in the 1960s? To me, a great aspect of my comic collecting is also the toy (particularly dolls and kits) collecting, so how about an article (or series of articles) on these nostalgic items?

Martin Gainsford
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CORRECTION: There was a caption error in COMICS SCENE #21, page 35. That isn't *actress Betty Lou Gershon (voice of Cruella de Vil) with animator Marc Davis; it's an (alas) unidentified woman. CS regrets the error.*

CORRECTION: CS#19 also had a wrong art credit.The drawing of Babs Bunny on page 46—credited mistakenly by CS to Ken Boyer—was actually done by Brian Mitchell.

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By BOB MILLER

When Art Vitello considered producing *Taz-Mania*, he asked his friends, "What do you think about the Tasmanian Devil? Think it's a good idea for a show?"

What he found out was, "He's on a lot of T-shirts, and when you mention his name, people say, 'Oh, great!' "

Vitello laughs. "I found out after I started working on the show just how popular the character is. I was mostly judging the show on the fact that Warner Bros. was willing to give me a free hand in developing it. But I've always liked the Tasmanian Devil."

The Tasmanian Devil, created and directed by Bob McKimson, originally appeared in five Warner Bros. cartoons from 1954 to 1964. The character also starred in a 1979 Christmas special directed by Friz Freleng. Last year, Warner Bros.—encouraged by his merchandising appeal—decided that Taz was popular enough to headline his own TV series.

Vitello was faced with the task of developing what had been, basically, a one-joke character. "For a few Warner Bros. shorts, we have a guy that eats and slobbers and is dangerous. Now, he has his own TV show, a 65-half-hour package. How do you keep that lively? I didn't think you could have every story where the guy was an eating machine.

"Most characters evolve. Bugs Bunny started out one way, and each director evolved him a different way," Vitello says. "So, I figured, well, let's evolve Taz. Let's see his different sides. We created a little universe for him to play in. That became the problem to solve. It was, 'Who are the characters to surround this guy with and to play against?' "

Vitello and his staff created three different playgrounds for the Devil: Domestic comedies involving his family; slapstick entanglements at the place where he works, the Hotel Tazmania (though the country's Tasmania); and antics in the Outback.

"I thought it would be really funny if he had a normal family," Vitello comments. "It's set in Tasmania, but it's basically an all-American family. Flying in the face of the trend of cartoons with dysfunctional families, I thought I would give him an overly-functional family—a good, happy family, so that he would really be in contrast with these people."

For example, here's what happens when his mom greets him in the morning:

"Honey, how's your day?"

"!R!#$*!%!#*H!"

"That's nice. What would you like for breakfast?"

"!R!#$*!%!#*H!"

"Taz, don't eat the refrigerator."

We set him at an age between 18 or 20. I don't think anybody knew what age the guy was in the old cartoons [see article, page 14]. Basically, the Tasmanian Devil lives in a cave, but the place is furnished Danish-modern," Vitello notes with a laugh. "They go shopping at all the same furniture stores that everybody else does. Taz's room would be the only exception. By his own choice, his room is more like the way wild animals live."

Fans may remember that in his

Here's Buddy Boar, Taz's pal—unless they're after the same thing.

Art Vitello likes having a "free hand" on *Taz-Mania* as producer, story editor, co-writer, voice-caster, voice director and overall art director.

A Taz's best friend is his pet turtle named Dog.

first two cartoons, "Devil May Hare" and "Bedeviled Rabbit," Taz was married to a She-Devil. This, according to Vitello, is a *separate* continuity from the TV series.

Taz's mom is Jean (voiced by Miriam Flynn), "a supermom of the '90s" involved with hobbies, selling cave condos and being "really understanding" with her family. The father, Hugh (Maurice LeMarche), is in the tradition of TV dads: friendly, home at day's end, but you don't know what he does for a living. Taz has a rambunctious four-year-old brother, Jake (Debi Derryberry), and a 12-year-old sister, Molly (Kellie Martin, from *Life Goes On*), an encyclopedia of pop culture. The family pet is a turtle named Dog (Rob Paulsen), who was raised by wild dogs out in the Outback, so he thinks he's a puppy.

One of Vitello's favorite episodes, "Mishap in the Mist," has a Jane Goodall-type anthropologist studying the Devil family as if they were apes.

"Of course, they're a very civilized family, but for Taz," Vitello says, laughing. "This woman has come along and set up a tent in their living room, and even though they're talking directly at her, she doesn't seem to get it. 'I-am-Jane. You-are-Bo-bo.' 'Oh, no, my name's Hugh.' "

As for Dizzy Devil, fans won't be seeing him or his *Tiny Toons* counterparts—who are characters co-owned by Steven Spielberg.

"This *isn't* the *Tiny Toons* Universe; this is the Warners Down Under Universe," Vitello states. "Characters like Bugs or Daffy can poke in their heads for a cameo. But generally we were trying to keep it that Taz was our character, and we created a whole world of characters for him. Hopefully, they'll catch your interest, the same way a good Warner Bros. character catches you."

One of *Taz-Mania*'s revelations is that the ravenous hero has a job at the island's theme attraction, the Hotel Tazmania. There, guests receive the normal Tasmanian animals serving on the premises. A 6' 5" koala named Constance (Rosalyn Landor) is a maid; Mr. Thickly (Dan Castellaneta, the voice of Homer Simpson) is a distinctive wallaby "who adds color to the place"; and Taz works as a bellhop and does various other chores (initially to get money to buy a motorcycle).

The hotel is "managed" by Bushwhacker Bob (Jim Cummings), a pompous fellow akin to Basil Fawlty (the John Cleese character in *Fawlty Towers*), though the place is really run by his mum (Landor).

The Platypus Brothers (Paulsen as Timothy, LeMarche as Daniel) are the island's only fix-it men, working around the hotel. Vitello describes them as "these really supportive, crazy little guys who never get anything right, but they're undaunted. If they blow up a building, they've blown it up brilliantly. In their own eyes, they *never* make a mistake. Once you get them started, they never stop."

During his Outback travels, the Tasmanian Devil contends with other crazy characters.

His best friend is Buddy Boar (Cummings), whom Vitello describes as "Taz's contemporary, age-wise. They're best buddies until they have to get the same thing, like they're chasing the same kind of food. They're very strong animals, so I felt that if Taz needed a friend, he needed somebody physically able to withstand the punishment that he would also get in a contest."

Taz encounters Wendel T. Wolf (Cummings), the last Tasmanian wolf, a depressed little character looking for a place to belong. Unfortunately for Taz, Wendel admires and tries to emulate him.

Didgeri Dingo (Paulsen) is a smooth-talking operator from the Outback who doesn't like to work—not when he can finagle Taz into doing the job.

All Taz-Mania Art & Photos: Copyright 1991 Warner Bros. Inc.

When Dan Castellaneta isn't voicing Homer Simpson, Vitello says he'll be "adding color to the [Hotel Tazmania]" as Mr. Thickly.

do their taxes properly; or 3) catch and bring back a real, live Tasmanian Devil. Francis chooses that final option.

"Two of my favorite characters are Bull [John Astin, from *The Addams Family*] and Axl [Paulsen], the two gators," Vitello says. "They trap animals for zoos because children go to zoos, so they do it for the children. They're hopelessly inept, as most of the show's characters are. But they play by the rules. They'll walk up to an animal and say, 'Excuse me, we're thinking you're a fine animal. Would you like to get in this cage? And we'll take you back to the zoo and children everywhere would love you.' That doesn't work in their favor as trappers. They're pretty silly characters."

Alas, Mel Blanc is no longer alive to voice the Tasmanian Devil, but Art Vitello has chosen a worthy successor, Jim Cummings (see page 34).

"Jim's very versatile. He has breathed some very fine life into this character," Vitello says. "Even through his grumbling, gags and spits, you really understand Taz just as well as you understand anybody else, because of the emotion that's coming out of it. It's not just a one-note 'E-e oo ah-ah unh.' There are many ways for those growls to express many things. And so it's a lot of fun to play with the dialogue because it's more of an attitude than words in most cases. But you gotta get the *right* attitude."

Then, there are the hunters.

Francis X. Bushlad (Paulsen) is Prince of the Mud Men, all of whom look like Francis (wearing grass skirts and such) but are Harvard-trained businessmen. To attain the rite of manhood in the tribe, one has to: 1) take over a Fortune 500 Company; 2)

Constance Koala cleans house as the Hotel Tazmania's maid.

He's Francis X. Bushlad, Prince of Mud Men. He must catch Taz to achieve manhood.

With "friends" like Bull Gator and Axl (left), Wendel T. Wolf and Didgeri Dingo, does Taz need enemies?

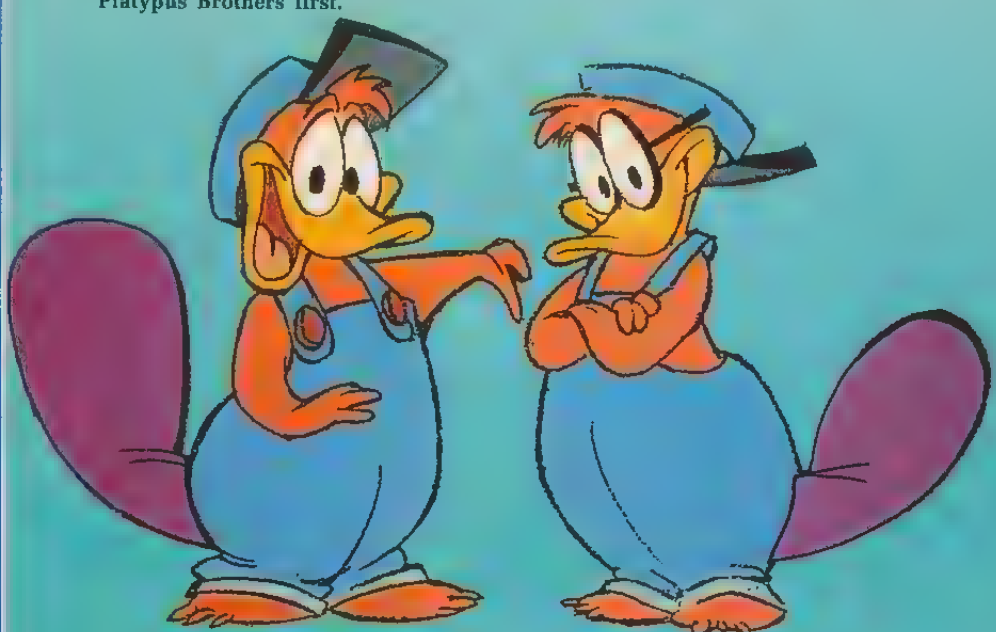
Art Vitello first worked with the Tasmanian Devil in 1979, when DePatie-Freleng produced *Bugs Bunny's Looney Christmas Tales*. Chuck Jones directed one short; Friz Freleng directed two. Vitello helped Freleng as a sequence director on "Fright Before Christmas," which featured Taz playing Santa Claus.

Later, Vitello worked as a producer/director for the first two seasons of *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* and a season of *Slimer!* He directed 14 half-hour *Tiny Toon Adventures*, one of which ("Hollywood Plucky") represented the show when it earned a daytime Emmy for Best Animated Series. Two Vitello episodes, "Devil Doggie" and "Debutante Devil," featured Dizzy Devil and/or his mentor, Taz. (Vitello discussed *Tiny Toons* in CS#17, #19).

Last September, Vitello completed his last *Tiny Toons* episode, "TT: Music Television." Jean MacCurdy, vice president and general manager of Warner Bros. TV animation, approached him with the proposal to produce *Taz-Mania*. "As much fun as *Tiny Toons* was, I liked the opportunity to jump onto a fresh project," Vitello says. "To have a clean slate to play with was very attractive to me."

Vitello and writer Nick Hollander prepared the story bible, which established the series' premise, format and character profiles. "I like to write," Vitello admits. "I used to be very involved with the writing on *Gummi Bears*. I had some writers on *Tiny Toons*—they had more of a formal system—but I had a lot of latitude to take the scripts and have some fun with them. On this show, another attractive thing was I could get a free hand in its writing and come up with characters like the Tasmanian Devil family, something I definitely wanted to play with. All the characters evolved themselves. When you start getting characters going, they sometimes take hold and run away with themselves. Suddenly, one day they start talking and you go, 'Whoa, that's good. I can do this with him now.' "

Need a fix-it man in Tasmania? You'll need a whole team if you hire the Platypus Brothers first.



For *Taz-Mania*, the producer, story editor, co-writer, voice-caster, voice director and overall art director all happen to be Vitello. "On this show, even though I've gone into the producer's slot, I'm still handling many overall directorial duties," he says. "I'll time a storyboard, or design a character here or there. Most of my effort goes into the writing of the show. That takes time. And then, when the animation comes back [from overseas production], I'll get into the editorial, sound FX, mixing and music."

Assisting Vitello are four unit directors: Lenord Robinson, Doug McCarthy, Keith Baxter and Gary Hartle. On *Tiny Toons*, McCarthy rendered storyboards; Baxter and Robinson were pose artists doing layouts and designs in Vitello's unit; while McCarthy, Baxter and Vitello

(continued on page 58)

Episode Guide

Crew:
Producer/story editor/co-writer/voice-caster/voice director/overall art direction: Art Vitello
Unit directors: Douglas McCarthy, Keith Baxter, Lenord Robinson Gary Hartle, Jon McClenahan
Composer: Richard Stalling
Sound effects: Russell Brower
Additional production: Wang Production Co. Ltd., Akom Productions, Star Toons
All episodes: one half-hour

Cast:
The Tasmanian Devil, Buddy Boar, Wendel T. Wolf, Bushwhacker Bob Jim Cummings.
Francis X. Bushlad, Timothy Platypus, Axl Gator, Didgeri Dingo, Dog the Turtle: Rob Paulsen
Mum, Constance Koala: Rosalyn Landor
Hugh, Daniel Platypus: Maurice LeMarche
Jean: Miriam Flynn
Jake: Debi Derryberry
Molly: Kellie Martin
Mr. Thickly: Dan Castellaneta
Bull Gator: John Astin
Bushrat, incidental characters: Phil Proctor

1991-1992 Season:

1. "**Dog the Turtle.**" Writers: Bill Kopp and Art Vitello. Director: Douglas McCarthy

Taz discovers a turtle raised by wild dogs in the outback. The turtle thinks he's a dog; Taz takes him home to be the family pet.

2. Act One: "**Like Father Like Son.**" Writers: Mark Saraceni and Vitello. Director: Keith Baxter

Taz's father, Hugh, tries to tame his son, but learns they're much alike.
Act Two: "**Frights of Passage.**" Writers: Kopp, Baxter and Vitello Director: Baxter.

Francis X. Bushlad, Prince of Mud Men, tries to capture Taz to prove he's a man.

3. Act One: "**War & Pieces.**" Writers. Saraceni and Vitello. Director: Lenord Robinson.

Taz's parents visit his grandmother, leaving him to babysit little brother Jake and sister Molly. When Taz and Molly get into a fight, Jake helps settle the dispute.
Act Two: "**Airbourne Airhead.**" Writers. Saraceni and Vitello. Director: Robinson.

Taz wants two large eggs at the top of Pointy Peak, the tallest peak in Tasmania. The Platypus Brothers try to help him which causes problems.

4. Act One: "**It's No Picnic.**" Writers: Saraceni and Vitello. Director: Gary Hartle.

Bull and Axl Gator capture Taz's family at a picnic.
Act Two: "**Kee Wee ala King.**" Writers: Henry Gilroy and Vitello. Director: Gary Hartle.

Taz and his best friend, Buddy Boar, hunt the kiwi, which they think is a tasty delicacy.

5. "**Devil of a Job.**" Writers: Gordon Kent and Vitello. Director: Douglas McCarthy

Taz needs money to buy a motorcycle, so he gets a job at the Hotel Tazmania

6. Act One: "**Battling Bushrats.**" Writers: Kopp and Vitello. Director: Baxter

Taz defends his home from bushrats and ants, who want to eat the family's dinner.
Act Two: "**Devil in the Deep Blue Sea.**" Writers: Baxter, Chris Otsuki, Kopp and Vitello. Director: Baxter.

Didgeri Dingo cons Taz into retrieving a sunken treasure, with Taz doing all the work

7. "**Woeful Work.**" Writers: Kent and Vitello. Director: Lenord Robinson.

Taz tries to eat Wendel T. Wolf, the last Tasmanian wolf, but he doesn't taste good. Wendel, looking for a family to adopt him, decides on Taz.

8. Act One: "**Devil with Violet Dress On.**" Writers: Kent and Vitello Director: Hartle

Taz's mum, Jean, decides they should spend the day doing "fun things" together. But whose idea of fun?
Act Two: "**Kidnapped Koala.**" Writers. Saraceni and Vitello. Director: Hartle.

Bull and Axl abduct Constance Koala. Taz tries to rescue her.

9. Act One: "**Mishap in the Mist.**" Writers: Kopp and Vitello. Director: McCarthy.

Anthropologist Jane Allgood studies the civilized Tasmanian Devil family, considering them primitive animals. They're unsure how to deal with her
Act Two: "**Toothache Taz.**" Writers: Kopp and Vitello. Director: McCarthy.

Taz, avoiding the dentist after suffering a toothache, runs to the Platypus Bros. for help—to his regret.

10. Act One: "**Here Kitty, Kitty, Kitty.**" Writers: Otsuki and Vitello. Director: Baxter.

Molly brings home a cute kitten, who turns into a monster when she leaves it in Taz's care.
Act Two: "**Enter the Devil.**" Writers Gilroy and Vitello. Director: Baxter.

Mr. Thickly, a wallaby of distinction, emulates a kung fu movie with himself as the master and Taz the student. Taz suffers many hard knocks on the road to enlightenment.

11. "**Bewitched Bob.**" Writers: Kent and Vitello. Director: Robinson

Bushwhacker Bob calls Taz to the hotel. Taz brings Jake with him to work. Three guests turn out to be witches, who need Taz as the key to open a dimensional portal. When bedlam breaks out, little Jake plays around the hotel, ignorant of the danger

12. Act One: "**Instant Replay.**" Writers: Gilroy and Vitello. Director: Jon McClenahan.

To learn from their mistakes, Bull and Axl study videos of their failures to capture the Tasmanian Devil.
Act Two: "**Taz and the Pterodactyl.**" Writers Otsuki and Vitello. Director McClenahan.

Taz's pterodactyl kit leads him into uncharted Tasmanian territory and an adventure with a real pterodactyl.

13. Act One: "**Pup Goes the Wendel.**" Writers: Kent and Vitello. Director: McCarthy.

Wendel T. Wolf convinces Taz to adopt him over Dog the Turtle, but learns it's not easy being a dog.
Act Two. "**I'm OK, You're Taz.**" Writers: Saraceni and Vitello. Director: McCarthy.

Taz submits to a personality make-over by Buddy Boar.

—Bob Miller/Information Courtesy Art Vitello

Photo Courtesy Robert McKimson Jr

Robert McKimson's Legacy

He was the seldom-celebrated third man of Warner's "Looney Tunes." And he created Speedy Gonzales, Foghorn Leghorn & the Tasmanian Devil.

By MICHAEL MALLORY

No one has made as large and as lasting a contribution to the cartoon field, with as little personal acclaim, as mild-mannered master artist Robert McKimson. One of the official sires of Bugs Bunny, McKimson worked for the Warner Bros. cartoon studio longer than anyone, from 1931 through its final gasp in 1968. He directed 170 cartoons—including Bugs Bunny's last theatrical release, "False Hare" ('64)—and was twice nominated for an Academy Award. He created five enduring characters—Speedy Gonzales, Foghorn Leghorn, the Tasmanian Devil, baby kangaroo Hippety Hopper (alias the "giant mouse") and Sylvester Jr.—and, as principal model-sheet maker for the studio, created the lasting look of "That Oscar-Winning Rabbit."

Yet McKimson and his contributions remain largely overshadowed by fellow directors Friz Freleng, Chuck Jones and Robert Clampett. Indeed, the *only* constant reminder of his presence at "Termite Terrace" is Saturday-morning's TV credit roll.

Who was Robert McKimson, and why has he been overlooked?

It can be argued that McKimson's untimely passing in 1977, just preceding the current cartoon-appreciation boom, robbed him of his chance in the spotlight.

But, according to those who knew McKimson, he wouldn't have sought the spotlight even if he'd had the chance. "He was *never* a man to brag, you know, not the Clampett kind of guy," says Friz Freleng. "He wasn't ringin' bells or honkin' horns."

Two facts arise from remembrances of Robert McKimson: He was an amazing natural artist; and, despite his quietness, he was a truly nice guy. "I never heard him swear and he never really got mad," says McKimson's son, Robert Jr. "He was just a very pleasant person, and really into his art."

Bill Melendez, who animated in McKimson's unit, remembers: "He was very dependable and easy to work with. All his work was very precise, but he did it without fire and brimstone. He was an unpompous human being, and a very decent one. There was no way you could dislike ol' Bob."

Born October 13, 1910 in Denver,

Colorado, Robert Porter McKimson was, by his own admission, drawing as soon as he could hold a pencil. His mother was an artist who nurtured his artistic leanings as well as those of his four siblings—including brothers Thomas and Charles, both of whom worked with Robert at Warner Bros. From childhood, McKimson showed an aptitude for art, even before receiving training. For 10 years, he studied anatomy as a doctor would, perfecting his knowledge of the human figure. His formal art training came from the Lukits School of Art, and he remained a skilled oil portraitist.

The McKimson family moved to California in 1926. Within a few years, both Robert and his older brother Tom were working for the then-small Walt Disney Studios. Though his name doesn't appear in studio records until 1930, Bob McKimson recalled working for Disney as early as 1928. While perfecting his Mickey Mouse as a $25-per-week assistant to animator Dick Lundy, another offer came in: Romer Grey, son of famed Western writer Zane Grey, was starting his own animation studio and offered both McKimsons $80 per week (in Depression-era dollars) to become full animators.

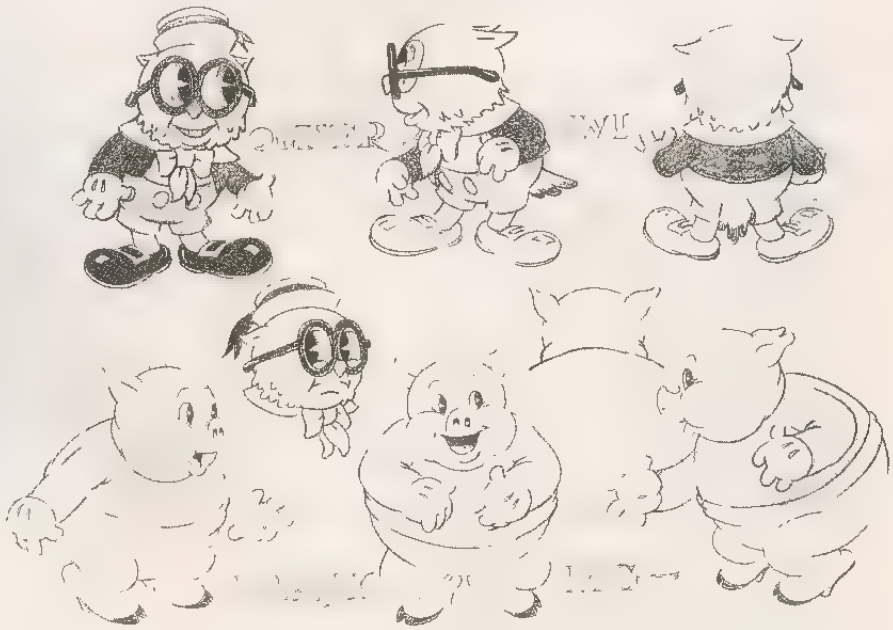
Thousands of animation drawings and production records were recently discovered by archivist Rollin Nesmith in the basement of the old Zane Grey house. They indicate that Romer Grey cartoons would have been as good as their contemporaries. Then known as "Buddy" McKimson (his family nickname), Robert was a key animator for the studio, which shot only *one* unreleased cartoon before folding.

"As I recall, they [the McKimson brothers] were working daytimes for Disney and moonlighting for Romer," says veteran animator Jack Zander, who got his start at the Grey Studio. "They were the only ones there who knew anything about animation. We learned a lot from them. They looked over our shoulders and showed us how to do it."

Barely out of his teens, McKimson had already developed the methodical work habits that would become a life-long trait. "Most animators wasted time," Zander says. "Bob didn't do that; he sat there and worked." McKimson's personal style had already become fixed as well: He had become a very dappper man who dressed conservatively and wore a trim black moustache and slicked-back hair, parted *exactly* in the center. "There was *never* a hair out of place," recalls Zander.

Art: Jean Blanchard/Courtesy Ned Comstock, USA Archives of Performing Arts

Jean Blanchard, one of the era's few women animators, caricatured McKimson in 1947.



All McKimson Model Sheet & Drawings Courtesy McKimson Productions, Inc

McKimson provided this model sheet for Porky Pig's debut, "I Haven't Got a Hat."

As the studio's principal model-sheet maker, Robert McKimson created the rabbit's enduring look.

Moviegoers first saw McKimson's name in the 1932 cartoon, "Bosko's Store," a Harman-Ising short that he and Friz Freleng animated. Shortly thereafter, Hugh Harman and Rudy Ising quit producer Leon Schlesinger over a money dispute and McKimson stayed on with Schlesinger, becoming part of the embryonic superstructure that would evolve into the Warner Bros. cartoon studio.

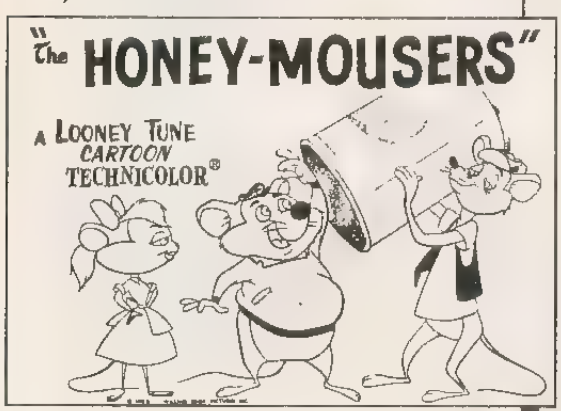
Most notable to his peers, then and now, was McKimson's ability to produce a finished clean drawing with *no* sketching. Animator Virgil Ross remembers: "He could draw it right off, without playing around with it. His pencil line was terrific. I don't know how he did it. He could also quickly knock out a lot of footage, more than most of us, because he could draw it right out without noodling around."

McKimson explained his speed to cartoon historian Mike Barrier in 1971: "In 1932, I was animating, doing about the same amount as every animator—20, 25, 30 feet per week tops. I had an auto accident, got thrown out of the car and pinched a couple of nerves in my neck. I got out of the hospital after a couple weeks and went back to work. All of a sudden, I could do 50, 60, 70, 80 feet per week. And it was easy!"

For several years, McKimson served as principal model-sheet maker for Warners, and in the mid-1930s was named animation supervisor. Not to be confused with the early screen title of "supervisor" (meaning director), McKimson functioned as a trouble-shooter, overseeing all studio animation as well as producing his own weekly quota. "If we had a drawing that wasn't quite right, we came to him and he would show us how to draw it," Virgil Ross remembers, "and he could do it very easily, with just one drawing. For instance, how would a tiger appear, looking straight down on its head? Well, he could draw it with no sketch lines, and it would look just like a tiger *should* look. He was able to answer any questions about anatomy and animals, or anything else, and draw it for you."

By the late 1930s, the studio was breaking ground and establishing its Looney identity with the all-star directorial line-up of Friz Freleng (CS #7), Robert Clampett, Tex Avery and Frank Tashlin. Soon to join the club was young Chuck Jones (CS #2), who would replace Tashlin—but only after the job had been turned down by Bob McKimson. "In 1937, Schlesinger offered me a direction spot," McKimson told Mike Barrier. "I told him I didn't particularly want it. I would rather learn a little bit more about making pictures before [directing]. He asked me how I thought Chuck Jones would do, and I said he would do fine. Chuck doesn't even know this!"

For the next several years, McKimson remained quietly busy at his neat drawing table, animating in the Avery, Jones and Clampett units. He revised the character-model sheets—one of which, done in 1943, created the standard look for the studio's star, Bugs Bunny. McKimson also contributed the famous "publicity shot" of the Wabbit, carrot in hand, mischief in mind, leaning against a tree.

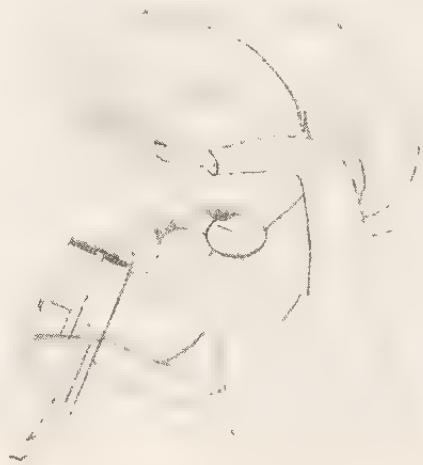


In the '50s, McKimson frequently spoofed TV shows. *The Honeymooners*' Jackie Gleason loved this one.

Photo courtesy Mel Blanc

At a 1948 taping session, voice virtuoso Mel Blanc worked with McKimson.

In 1945, history repeated itself: Frank Tashlin (who had returned to the studio only two years earlier) was again leaving and a new director was sought. This time Bob McKimson felt he was ready.



Professor Calvin Q. Calculus creates a portable hole in "The Hole Idea," which McKimson animated and directed.

The Robert McKimson unit immediately made a strong showing with "Daffy Doodles" ('46). The cartoons that followed were hits with both audiences and the front office. McKimson's fourth cartoon, "Walky Talky Hawky" ('46) was nominated for an Academy Award. This fast start is even more impressive when one realizes that he began directing just as the Warners cartoon studio was entering its peak period. There was no time for trial-and-error. McKimson was immediately expected to keep up with the Joneses (and Frelengs and Clampetts).

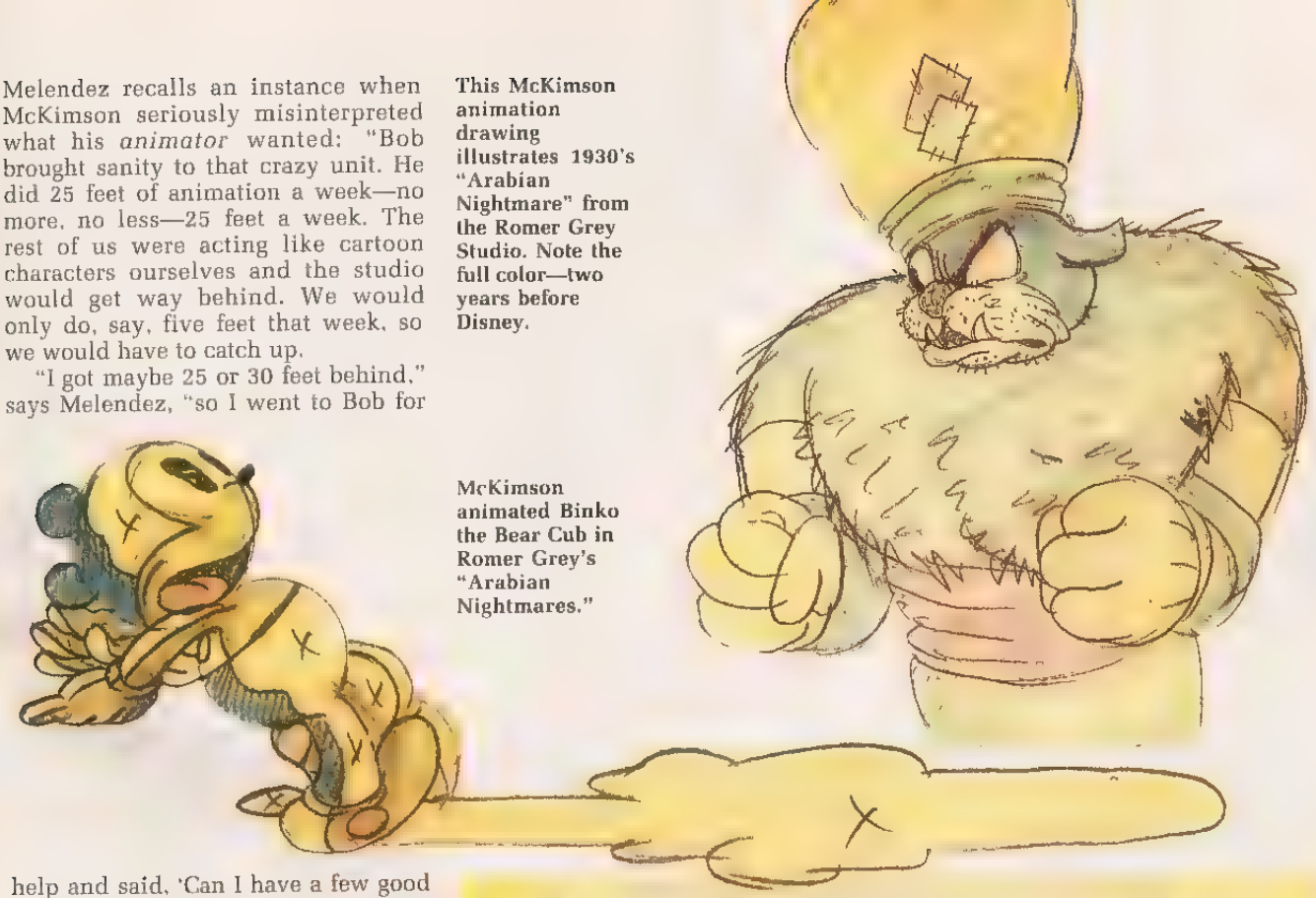
McKimson wasn't intimidated. Animator/director Bill Melendez characterizes him as a confident director who knew and could communicate exactly what he wanted. Still,

Melendez recalls an instance when McKimson seriously misinterpreted what his *animator* wanted: "Bob brought sanity to that crazy unit. He did 25 feet of animation a week—no more, no less—25 feet a week. The rest of us were acting like cartoon characters ourselves and the studio would get way behind. We would only do, say, five feet that week, so we would have to catch up.

"I got maybe 25 or 30 feet behind," says Melendez, "so I went to Bob for help and said, 'Can I have a few good scenes where I can get caught up?' He used to give everybody else just a hold on a face with a mouth moving, and that's what I had hoped he would give me. So, he says, 'Oh, I got one that's just right for you; you'll love it, really an animator's scene!' And he gives me a goddamn scene that had Bugs Bunny, a big gorilla, about four or five sailors, even Christopher Columbus, I think—it was incredible! Just the *most* difficult scene he could have given me!" Melendez says with a laugh. "But Bob thought, in his own sweet way, that I was asking for a real good juicy scene to get caught up on. He completely misread my plea."

After the short-lived but spirited Arthur Davis unit (CS #13) was dropped in 1949, Bob McKimson became responsible for a full-third of the studio's output. McKimson cartoons were characteristically precise, realistic and detailed. "I have a feeling his pictures may have cost a little bit more than ours because he tended to do more detail," says Chuck Jones. And while McKimson was perfectly capable of delivering no-holds-barred lunacy—"Boobs in the Woods" ('50), a Daffy and Porky teaming, is a good example—as the 1950s progressed, his style became calmer and more down-to-Earth. "He did his thing and did it his way," says Melendez. "I admired him for that. He didn't suddenly become a poor man's Bob Clampett or Tex Avery."

McKimson's characters looked and acted realistically—sometimes *too* realistically, according to Virgil Ross:



This McKimson animation drawing illustrates 1930's "Arabian Nightmare" from the Romer Grey Studio. Note the full color—two years before Disney.

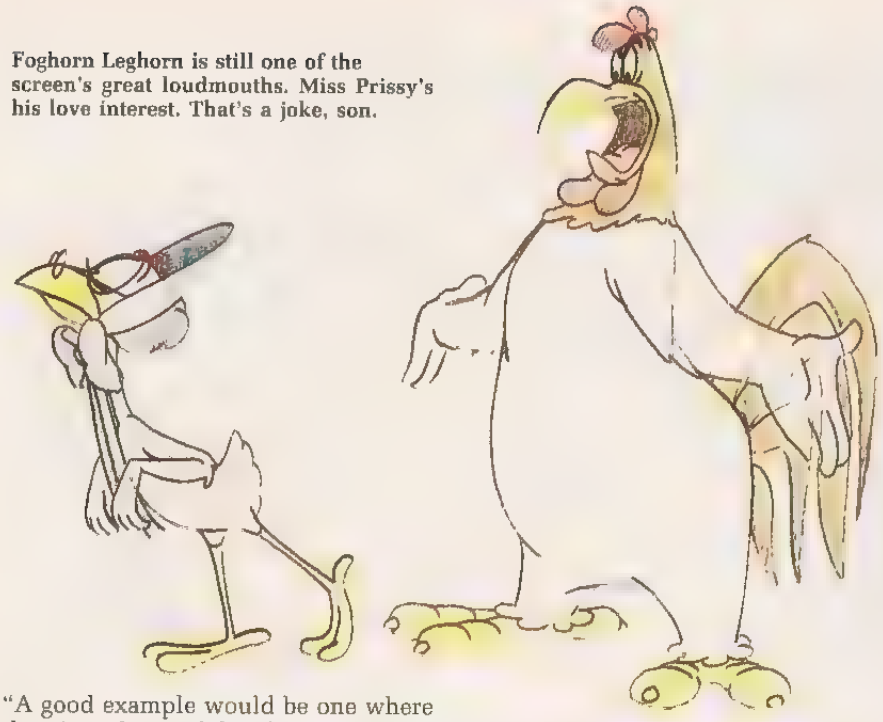
McKimson animated Binko the Bear Cub in Romer Grey's "Arabian Nightmares."

Art Courtesy Rollin & Margaret Nesmith/Binko Animation Art

Bugs Bunny tries out his "Hare-um Scare-um" look in a McKimson model sheet dated April 1938.

Art Courtesy Rollin & Margaret Nesmith/Binko Animation Art

All Warner Bros. Characters & Art: Copyright 1991 Warner Bros. Inc



Foghorn Leghorn is still one of the screen's great loudmouths. Miss Prissy's his love interest. That's a joke, son.

"A good example would be one where there's a dog and [Foghorn Leghorn] pulls him out of the doghouse and starts paddling him on the rear end. That actually *hurt* when I watched that, it was so graphically perfect."

While a director's personality is never a good gauge of his work, as evidenced by the quiet and serious Tex Avery, it can be argued that some of Bob McKimson's reserve slipped into his cartoons. "He drew like his personality—very precise, no fooling around, no monkey-business," says Jack Zander. Chuck Jones adds, "He was much more controlled than most of us. He was a good man, but he didn't have the traces of insanity prevalent among most of us. He was in control of his drawing and had more confidence than the rest of us."

Furthermore, McKimson's nature may have conspired against his product, as Friz Freleng notes: "Bob *didn't* assert himself. When he was assigned animators by the head of the studio, he accepted anybody. He accepted second-class animators. Other directors realized that they had a choice and the leftovers were given to Bob, and Bob seemed to get along with everybody." (One animator in his unit of the early 1950s he *certainly* got along with was his brother Charles.)

Where the real and "reel" Bob McKimsons become polarized is in his treatment of characters, which are notably brash and talkative. McKimson's Bugs Bunny is the brashest of anyone's—a fast-talking slicker, more confrontational than reactive. "Bugs was a pixie character, the kind of character that did everything people would love to do, but don't dare," McKimson explained to Mark Nardone in 1977.

And in Foghorn Leghorn, who first appeared in "Walky Talky Hawky," the quiet director unleashed one of the great loudmouths of all time. Foghorn was exclusively McKimson's and was one of his favorite characters. Highly reminiscent of Kenny Delmar's then-current Senator Claghorn (heard on radio's *Fred Allen Show*), the Big Chicken, McKimson claimed, was actually based on a character from an earlier radio show, *Blue Monday Jamboree*.

McKimson's fondness for loudmouth characters meant that the emphasis in his cartoons would be on dialogue and not pantomime. Working first with writer Warren Foster and later with Tedd Pierce, McKimson's best efforts achieve the verbal hilarity of classic radio comedy.

The '50s saw some of McKimson's most notable creations, including Speedy Gonzales and the Tasmanian Devil, who was created reportedly because McKimson felt it was the only animal on Earth yet to be depicted in a cartoon! Studio head Jack O. Warner loved Taz; Warner Bros. cartoon producer Eddie Selzer hated him; and the impact of the character was so great that it's startling to realize *only five* Taz cartoons were made. (He does, however, star in a new series, *Taz-Mania*, see page 9).

One of the director's personal favorites was a so-called "gimmick" picture titled "The Hole Idea" ('55), in which a meek professor develops portable holes for the benefit of mankind (and to dispose of his hatchet-faced wife). McKimson was sole animator of this cartoon. The 1957 Speedy Gonzales opus "Tabasco Road" garnered McKimson his second Academy Award nomination.

The new medium of television became a source of inspiration for the director, who carved a niche as a parodist. Among the best of McKimson's TV satires is "Stupor Duck" ('56) in which a caped Daffy Duck tries disastrously to fight for "Truth, Justice and the American Way." To say that McKimson's TV parodies date badly is to miss the point: These cartoons were made for audiences of that day. No one had an inkling they would become immortal.

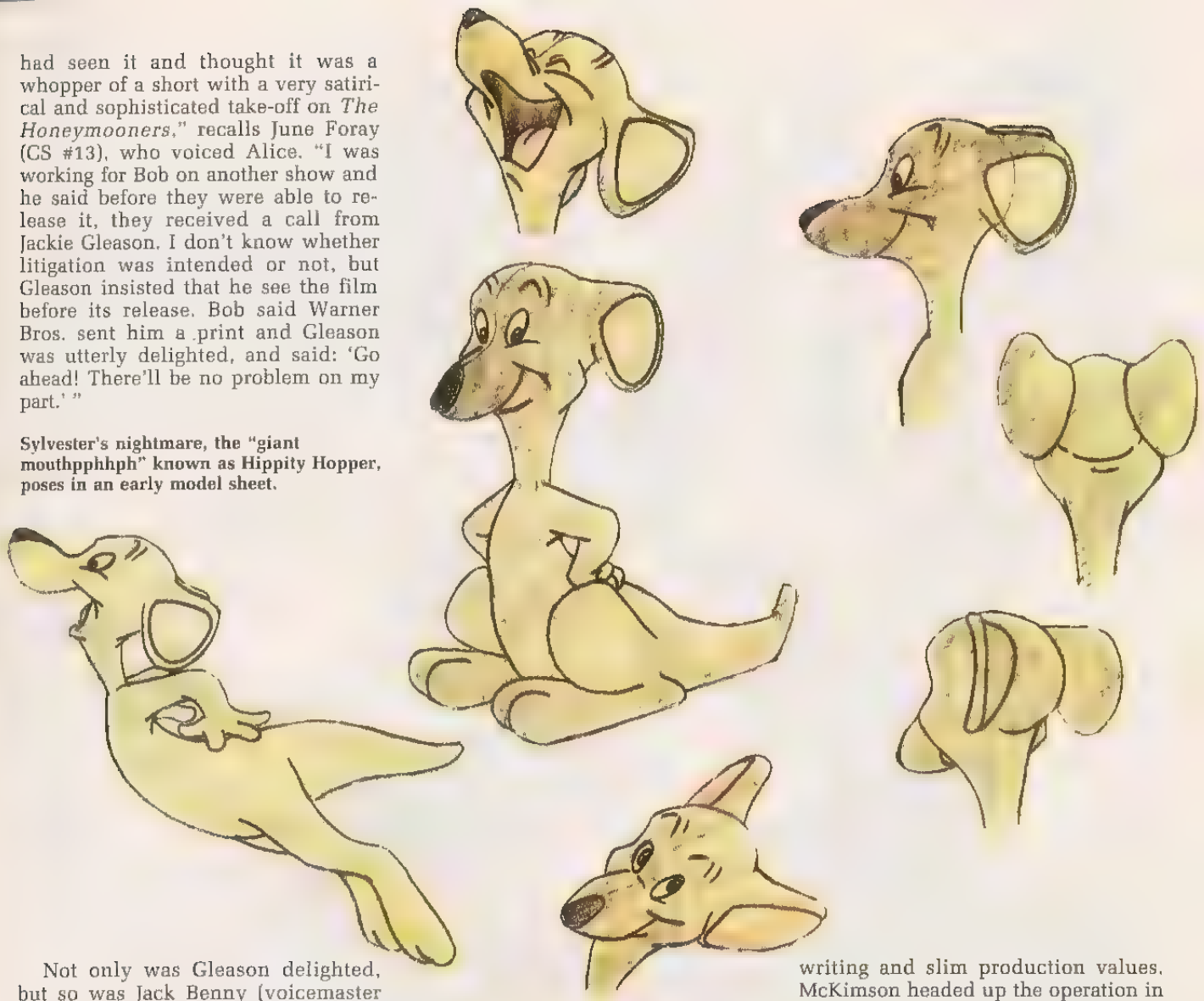
One TV parody that has survived the years is "The Honeymousers" ('56), which re-created TV's *Honeymooners* in rodent form. But the cartoon, which was popular enough to warrant two sequels, almost didn't make it to the screen. "I

Here's Jack, the perfect realization of Jack Benny in 1959's "The Mouse That Jack Built."

The original Speedy Gonzales from 1953's "Cat-tails for Two" was a quite different mouse.

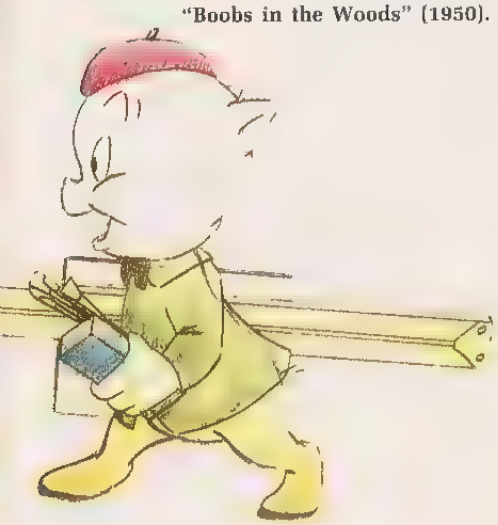
had seen it and thought it was a whopper of a short with a very satirical and sophisticated take-off on *The Honeymooners*," recalls June Foray (CS #13), who voiced Alice. "I was working for Bob on another show and he said before they were able to release it, they received a call from Jackie Gleason. I don't know whether litigation was intended or not, but Gleason insisted that he see the film before its release. Bob said Warner Bros. sent him a print and Gleason was utterly delighted, and said: 'Go ahead! There'll be no problem on my part.' "

Sylvester's nightmare, the "giant mouthpphhph" known as Hippity Hopper, poses in an early model sheet.



Not only was Gleason delighted, but so was Jack Benny (voicemaster Mel Blanc's longtime radio/TV co-star), who saw the picture and wanted similar treatment. The result was probably McKimson's most noted cartoon, "The Mouse That Jack Built" ('59), featuring the entire *Jack Benny* cast as mice. Benny offered his services and those of his cast gratis, asking only for a print as payment. Due to union regulations, everyone ultimately received scale. "A wonderful bunch of people," McKimson said of the *Benny Show* cast.

Portrait of the artist as a young pig. It's from one of McKimson's best shorts, "Boobs in the Woods" (1950).



Around this time, McKimson thought Warners cartoons were running out of gas. "It was towards the end of the '50s, and into the early '60s, just before we closed down, that things got too subtle, with everything underplayed," he told Mark Nardone in 1977. "[Bugs] became too much of a suave character. I thought that was bad. Sometimes you don't always progress in the right direction."

Right direction or wrong, McKimson stayed with Warners through its closing in 1963 and its re-opening the next year, under the auspices of DePatie-Freleng, while working on outside projects such as *The Incredible Mr. Limpet* and the weekly *Bugs Bunny* TV show. Many of his final cartoons were formula duels between Speedy and Daffy (who retired to Mexico, apparently), but they still showed sharp timing and posing to make up for the limp writing and slim production values. McKimson headed up the operation in its final year, 1968, creating new characters such as Rapid Rabbit and Bunny and Claude. By then, the parade had passed.

After the cartoon unit closed for good, McKimson free-lanced, working on title animation with his brother Charles at Pacific Title, directing for DePatie-Freleng, making animated TV commercials, and designing Warner Bros. cartoon "walkaround" characters for live attractions.

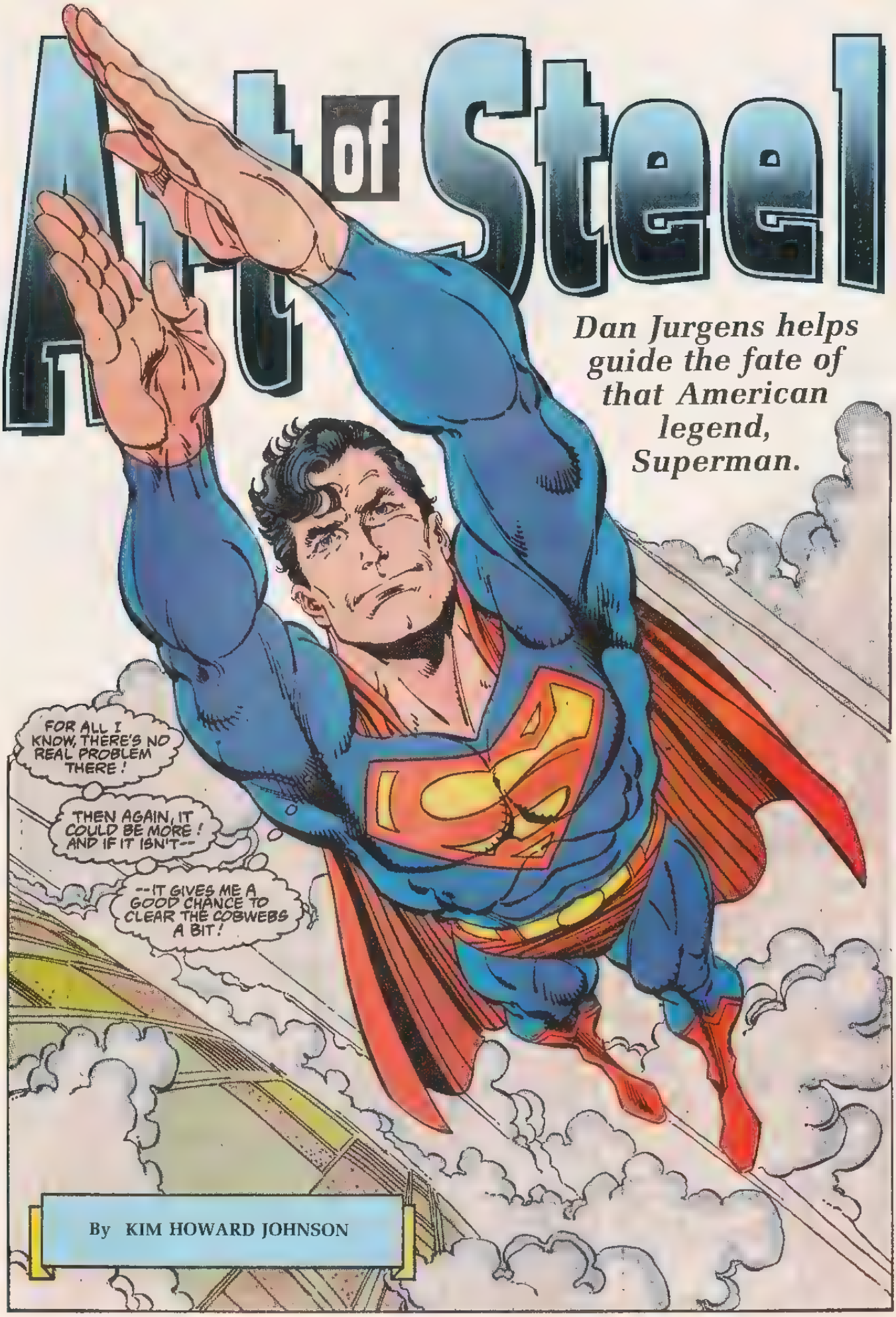
Into his sixties, McKimson remained generally fit (despite a case of emphysema aggravated by smoking) and seemed to take a Dorian Gray approach to aging. September 27, 1977 began as just another work day in McKimson's long career. He showed up for work at DePatie-Freleng, where he was directing "The Nitwits," and went to lunch at a nearby restaurant with Friz Freleng and other co-workers. While in the restaurant, he suddenly suffered a heart attack and died at age 66.

"He passed away right in front of

(continued on page 58)

Art of Steel

Dan Jurgens helps guide the fate of that American legend, Superman.


FOR ALL I KNOW, THERE'S NO REAL PROBLEM THERE!
THEN AGAIN, IT COULD BE MORE! AND IF IT ISN'T--
--IT GIVES ME A GOOD CHANCE TO CLEAR THE COBWEBS A BIT!

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Art: Dan Jurgens/Art Thibert/Colors Glenn Whitmore

MAYBE THE QUANTUM GENERATOR IS RESPONSIBLE! I KNOW ALL TOO WELL THAT THE QUANTUM FIELD IS LINKED TO THE TIME STREAM IN --
WAIT! THAT WOMAN WHO'S JUST APPEARED, IS MOVING TOO!

I HAVE ARRIVED AT THE DESIGNATED MOMENT IN 1991, HUNTER, AND OUR INSTRUMENTS WERE CORRECT.
THAT B.. P IN THE TIME STREAM WE DETECTED WAS APPARENTLY CAUSED BY A RUPTURED QUANTUM GENERATOR

All Superman Characters & Art Trademark & Copyright 1991 DC Comics Inc

Superman writer/artist Dan Jurgens is glad to see the character "move forward for once, instead of standing still."

There's something very special about Superman, agrees Dan Jurgens. Nearly everyone is familiar with the character, the costume and even the supporting cast. Batman is the only other superhero who comes close to Superman's universal fame. The man on the street may be familiar with Spider-Man, yet how many recognize J. Jonah Jameson? More Americans can identify Perry White and Jimmy Olsen than can name their own congressman.

Working on a true American legend is a responsibility that Jurgens, who started out as a penciller on the series, takes seriously.

"I always have that feeling that I'm doing something special," says Jurgens, "but for me, the point was driven home one Saturday afternoon. George Perez had been plotting the book. Mike Carlin, the editor of *Superman*, called me up and said George was leaving, and did I want to write it? I got nervous! Mike was talking about an American icon."

Jurgens' first work on the Man of Steel was the 1986 *Adventures of Superman Annual*, written by Jim Starlin. He has worked nearly continuously on the character since then, writing as well as pencilling the hero who established the comics industry.

Chronicling the adventures of Superman has its advantages and its disadvantages. "Knowing that I'm working on something special makes it easier to get the juices flowing. I don't have as much leeway to veer with the character, but that doesn't mean we can't do good stories—and that makes it more challenging. Many characters have changed and become darker, like Batman, but I just can't picture that with Superman. I still think we can do good stories without turning in that direction."

The addition of *Superman: The Man of Steel* to the other three Superman titles means that the hero appears virtually every week, often in multi part stories. Close teamwork is required to coordinate matters. Fortunately, all of the creators have a good working relationship with each other (see sidebar).

"First of all, everybody on the books has a mutual respect for each others' work," Jurgens says, an attitude that dates back to John Byrne's revamping of the character in 1986, a situation maintained by creators like Jerry Ordway, Marv Wolfman and Roger Stern. "When we all sit down and start throwing around ideas, we're willing to compromise a little bit, and sometimes someone will go a little more in his own direction. If we ever violently disagree, we're all willing to back down. Now, Louise Simonson and Jon Bogdanove have joined, and they're approaching it with the same attitude. We love the characters, and we think about them the same way."

The artists—who often draw different chapters of the same story—must have similar yet distinctive styles.

"It has to be consistent to a point," says Jurgens. "We've all discussed this. Jerry and I, as artists, think somewhat the same, and we approach many problems similarly, yet we draw totally differently. We have the same methodology, but a different result. Everybody draws differently. There's no house style. Bob McLeod's Superman is different from mine, is different from Jon's, is different now from Tom Grummett's. If it was really a weekly comic, with

Art Dan Jurgens/Brett Breeding

"Everyone understands Superman," notes Jurgens, including guest star Waverider.

one guy who could possibly draw four books a month, every month for a year, that would get boring in a hurry. I like seeing the difference.

"Everyone has real strengths. Again, I go back to the idea of seeing stuff that juices me. Bob McLeod's stuff, for example, has nice lighting that I can't do. People reading Bob's book are going to get it—they're not going to get it from me," says Jurgens, explaining how they play off each other, even mixing up the art teams to keep things fresh.

"We have a very dedicated group of people," he explains. "It's not like the inkers are saying, 'OK, I've got these 22 pages I've got to get done in a week.' They're actually conscious of what everyone else is doing, and everybody seems to be trying to put their best into it. That's the big difference between meeting deadlines for the sake of meeting deadlines, and wanting to do the best you can do."

Starting *Superman: The Man of Steel* meant bringing the Simonson-Bogdanove team into the group and working with the new players.

"We all realized that when you start up a fourth book, no matter who's going to do it, it's going to make coordination more difficult. It'll be tougher absorbing everybody into it. The nice thing about it is, we can add enthusiasm that way by bringing in people with new ideas that we wouldn't have had. They can make contributions that we wouldn't have come up with on our own. And they have! It was tough making a fourth book, but they certainly have pulled their weight," says Jurgens.

The Superman creative teams assemble annually to plan the year's issues, and also to get to know each other face-to-face. With 52 issues of *Superman* per year (including annuals), such get-togethers have become necessities, to develop "road maps," if not full plots, and to discuss major developments.

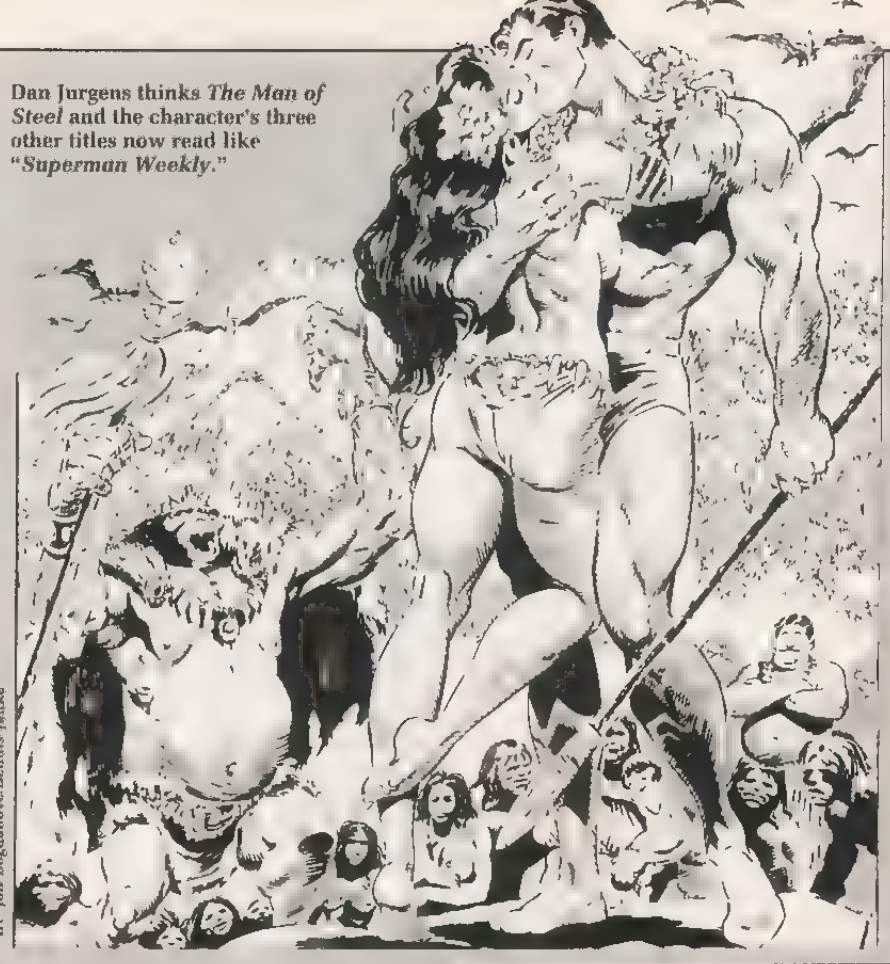
The *Superman* titles have taken longtime fans and new readers by surprise with certain changes occurring in the books, but perhaps none is more significant than the engagement of Clark Kent and Lois Lane.

"It came from out of nowhere," says Jurgens, who's joined by Mike Carlin and Jerry Ordway in elaborations on the Man of Steel's exploits.

Ordway, who's leaving after years of writing and pencilling *Adventures of Superman* (CS #3), says the team took a chance with the engagement.

"Mike and I were working on the plot for *Superman* #50, and we knew

Dan Jurgens thinks *The Man of Steel* and the character's three other titles now read like "*Superman Weekly*."



Art: Jon Bogdanove/Dennis Janke

Super Stories

Readers may enjoy a new *Superman* issue every week, but coordinating four different titles through multi-part stories, with different creative teams, requires careful communication.

"I think of it as *Superman Weekly*," says writer/artist Dan Jurgens. "We get together, and we have charts that we lay out for a year or two years down the road. They're blocked out week by week by week. It's drawn out issue by issue. It ends up looking like a weekly comic book. Once we have that, that's our road map. Then, we run up huge phone bills trying to fix it along the way!"

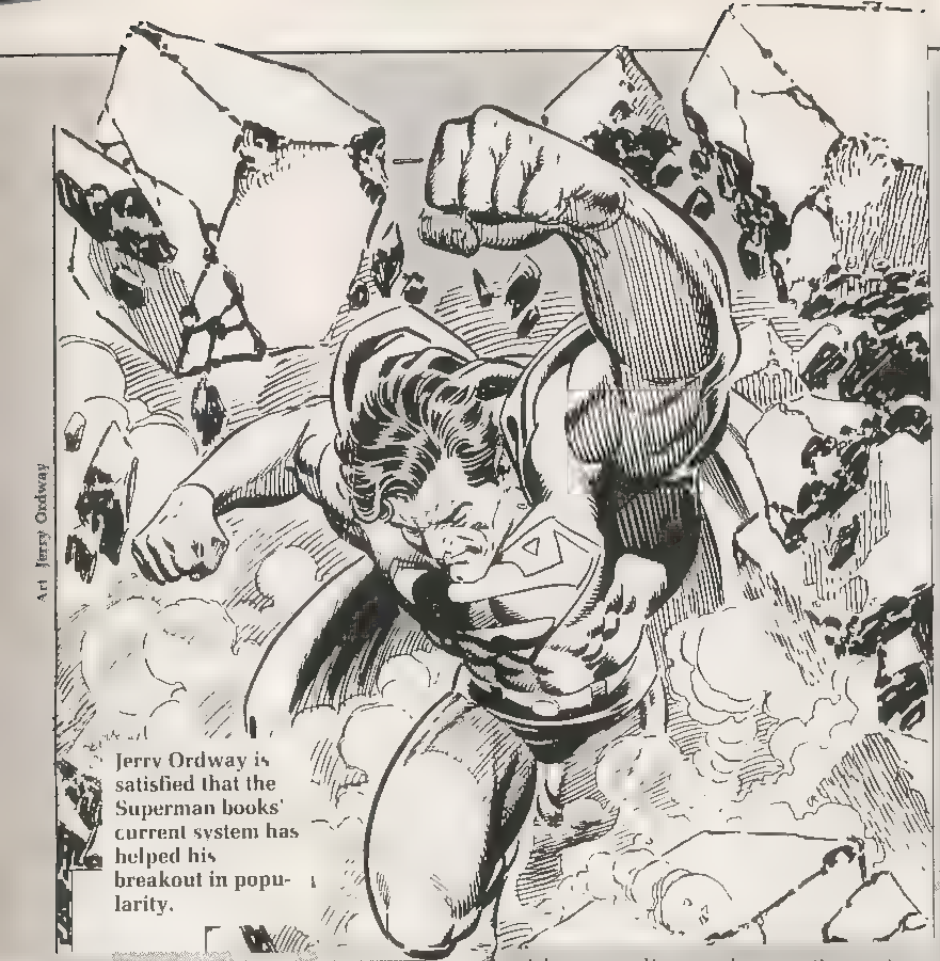
Even though there can be problems with different teams doing different chapters of longer stories, Jurgens wouldn't want the same writer/artist pair doing multi-part stories.

"Time would make it impossible," he says. "Part of what happens is that everyone who works on the book, including the inkers, all get to see the stories, the plots, everything as it comes in. It all goes into the copier hopper, and it's spread out, going to the editor and the 15 or 20 guys who work on the book. As it comes in, we get to see what everyone else is doing. I'll see pages from a cover that Jerry Ordway has done, and I'll feel inadequate, like I've got to work harder. We all work together, and some of that would be removed if we all tried to stake out little private territories."

"SUPERMAN WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A BREAK? YOU'VE BEEN GOING AT THIS ALL NIGHT AND ALL MORNING"
IS EVERYONE ACCOUNTED FOR, PROFESSOR?
WELL NO

Art: Bob McLeod/Denis Rodier

Another longtime *Superman* writer/artist, Ordway explains, "When John Byrne first started doing *Action* and *Superman* and I was working on *Adventures*, we were trying to maintain almost a nod toward the other books like, 'Yeah, that's happening.' Of course, it became almost a marketing tool as well, to have them tied together. *Superman* would sell better than *Action* or *Adventures*. When we first came up with a story that crossed over, the idea was to get people to buy *all* three parts. For



Art: Jerry Ordway

Jerry Ordway is satisfied that the Superman books' current system has helped his breakout in popularity.

THE JOB'S DONE
RS MAY BE ALIVE
APPED ER THE KAGE
WHY DON'T YA TAKE THE GEEZER'S ADVICE? MY RING HASN'T DETECTED ANY MORE SIGNS OF LIFE UNDER THIS MESS
AND I CAN'T HEAR ANY SAY WE'VE MADE OUR LAST RESCUE

According to Ordway, the Superman creative teams each have "a separate story to tell, with threads that tie together."

example, with the *Legends* crossovers, *Superman* sold real well, *Adventures* sold pretty good, and *Action*—well, they didn't sell equally, so we knew somebody was willing to live with just having one part of a three-part story. It was frustrating."

"It wasn't just trying to get the customer to shell out more money, it was a question of wanting people to get the whole picture," explains editor Mike Carlin. "They can't possibly understand everything and get the whole tapestry and the whole weave of it without reading each part. So, we're trying to make it easier for them to switch from book to book with things like the [numbered] triangle on the cover, and just making people aware that every three or four months, we'll do a stretched-out story across all the books, and then for three or four months, we'll do solo stories with subplots from one book to the next."

"A good example was our '*Man of Steel*' month," says Ordway. "We were all mixed up within all four books—10 pages here, 10 pages there. That was major brain drain—it was really tough! But then, we came up with four issues of stories that tie in. Dan had done a story in which Lois Lane praised Superman in the *Daily Planet*, and in the one that followed the next week in *Adventures*, I used that same newspaper that Dan had used to set up a totally different story about the beginning of the *Daily Planet* strike. It winds up with each of us having a separate story to tell, with threads that tie together."

The current system on the *Superman* titles is ambitious, but it seems to be working—and it is making its creators very happy, according to Jerry Ordway.

"It makes it more satisfying for us, too," he says, "because we're not constantly doing the ending for someone else's stories—or the beginnings or the middles."

—*Kim Howard Johnson*

we were getting to the point where we wanted to have Lois and Clark more involved and less antagonistic. As we started thinking about it, we decided it would be a cop-out not to—there's a point where you just take chances," says Ordway.

"Literally, we thought of it on the spur of the moment," says Carlin. "I went into the office the next day, and they *let* us do it! That was the amazing thing. I'm sure people have thought of it over the years, and this time they let us do it, because they seem to trust what we're doing."

Will there be a Super-wedding? "We're working toward it," Carlin admits. "As long as everybody approves it, it'll be fine. So far, Jenette Kahn is all for this. She's really supporting us."

Although there's no wedding in sight for at least the next year, the Man of Steel will have much more to do than pick out silverware patterns. He has just recovered from amnesia ("It's an old bit that has been on every TV sitcom, but we tried to do a twist on it and do it well," says Jurgens), and he's getting ready for the holidays.

"I'm doing another Christmas story. I like doing those," says Jurgens. "Then, we're doing a story line where Earth faces a potential invasion. Usually, what happens is that the alien invasion force lands on the planet, and New York gets blown up again. This time, Superman will lead a number of heroes into space.

"After that, Superman will be joining the Justice League! It will come out of the invasion."

Readers will also be seeing more of the newest member of the cast—Lex Luthor Jr.

"Luthor had a son that nobody knew about," Jurgens announces. "Lex Luthor Jr. is coming on the scene as a good guy, just as economic strife hits Metropolis! Jimmy has gotten laid off from the *Daily Planet*, Clark and Lois are on strike with everybody else from the *Planet*, and Lex Luthor, Jr. has come on and helped save the city. He looks, to all of Metropolis, like a savior."

Lex Sr. is dead, and readers will even see his body to prove it. "We had to come up with something new," Carlin explains.

"Morgan Edge was predominant for a while—any big city always has key figures working behind the scenes to wrest power away from somebody else, whether it's politicians, businessmen—and Lex Luthor had been used enough," Ordway says. "We had seen him as a pretty bad guy, so it was hard to take him seriously as a businessman."

"We had used Luthor a lot,"

WELCOME TO PROJECT CADMUS SUPERMAN I REALIZE THIS IS PROBABLY QUITE A SHOCK FOR YOU
BUT DUBBILEX HAS TO RUN A THOROUGH MIND PROBE ON YOU AND WE KNEW YOU'D NEVER SUBMIT WILLINGLY
THIS IS INSANE! SINCE WHEN DID CADMUS DECIDE TO GO AFTER THE GOOD GUYS?
AND GUARDIAN--HOW CAN YOU EVEN BE A PART OF TH S?
NO COMMENT

Art: Dan Jurgens/Brett Breeding

Old-time fans enjoy the old-time fun that Jurgens' *Superman* offers, as well as seeing classic characters like Guardian.

Jurgens adds. "It had gotten to the point where Superman knew seven ways to Sunday that the guy was bad news. We were stretching the point of believability if we didn't have Superman solve it somehow, or kill nim. So, we took care of that."

There are significant developments afoot for Superman's other supporting players, including some of his ladies.

"Pete Ross and Lana Lang are *brewing* as a couple," Jurgens reveals. "I like that a lot, because Lana Lang is my favorite character in the book. She's the girl left behind. No matter what happens, she'll *always* love Superman, and he won't love her back. I always liked that, and that makes for good stories and good characters. So, they'll become tighter. Also, Supergirl will come back in a pocket universe story.

"Jimmy Olsen will bounce progressively from one job to a worse job, and even worse ones as he goes along. Eventually, he'll wind up living out of his car. He knows a tow truck might come up and tow him away that's rock bottom! He has to keep his mother and his girl friend from finding out that he doesn't have a job anymore.

"Perry White has been on a leave of absence from the *Planet* because of the stuff going on, mostly his son's death. As part of the whole strike settlement, he'll walk back in and take back his old chair," says Jurgens.

"The old-time fans, who I'm happiest to hear from at conventions, are saying that they *like* what we're doing, and that means a lot," says Carlin, "because we're *not* ruining their old-time fun. He's still Superman—these are really surface changes. Lois and Clark are together all the time anyway—so what if they're living in the same apartment? So what if they're together; they're together anyway! There's not really that big of a physical difference in future stories. Brainiac will still attack—but they're also planning their wedding. Everything is the same; they're just standing in different positions. And people seem to be responding to that."

Superman has undergone a resurgence of popularity recently, spurred in part by his engagement, which caught the attention of the national press. Jurgens points out that *Entertainment Tonight* even did a story on Jimmy Olsen's layoff from the *Daily Planet*.

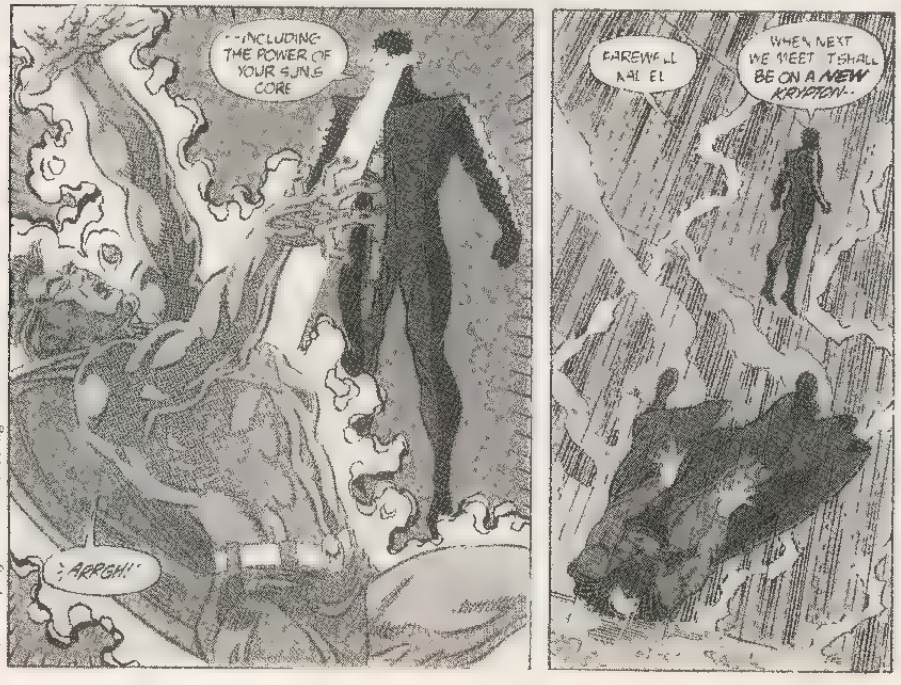
"Everybody understands Superman, and for TV, it's an easy story to do," says Jurgens. They know they can mention Superman, and everyone *knows* right away. They know it makes good TV, because there have been movies and TV shows done, and they have footage of that. He's a celebrity, and he can be on *Entertainment Tonight*, right next to Marlon Brando and Sylvester Stallone.

"The only disadvantage I can see is that sometimes people have a preconceived notion about what we're doing, from other stuff done 40 or 50 years ago. It's a little frustrating. Sometimes I wish they would just try the new stuff to see if they like it or not. It's cool if they don't like it, but at the same time, we're not really doing what has been done. It's the same people and the same basic underlying tone, but we're trying to progress. DC is really helping us out, making the book move forward for once, instead of standing still

"We've taken Superman out of costume for issues, and had him grow a beard. These things kind of wreck the perception that DC would never alter Superman's image. By doing that, that gave them the feeling that anything *could* happen—maybe it's not as predictable as they thought. It's like, 'My God, DC will dare to change his costume,' or get him engaged, and that helps a lot when a character has been around for 50 years," Dan Jurgens smiles.

"Readers don't think they can predict what's going to happen next—and they *can't*!"

The Superman books' creative teams, which include Jurgens, made *The Man of Steel*'s debut memorable for our hero.



Art: Dan Jurgens/Brett Breeding

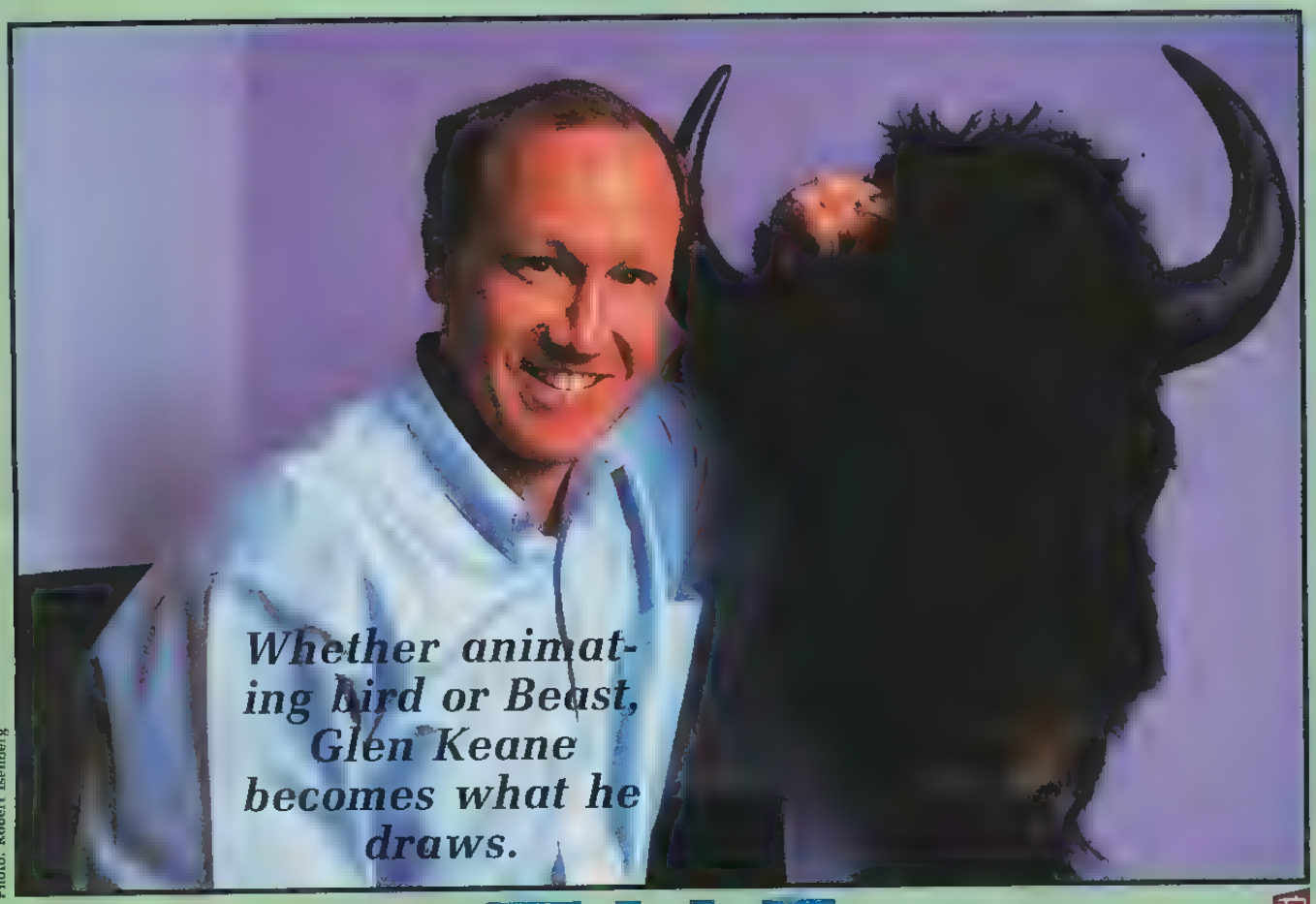


Photo: Robert Isenberg

Whether animating bird or Beast, Glen Keane becomes what he draws.

THE Quintessential ANIMATOR

By JAMI BERNARD

Mild-mannered Glen Keane, one of the premier animators working today, is crouching on the easy chair in his living room, arms raised, as if he is about to pounce on his wife, who is lying motionless on the floor. What is this guy, some kind of beast?

No, but he will be. Right now he is a bird flapping his arms, and his wife is videotaping his every movement to help research how to draw Marahute, the mythical eagle of *The Rescuers Down Under*. Later, of course, he will draw—make that *become*—the Beast for the Thanksgiving release *Beauty & the Beast*, because animators are basically actors. Ham actors, sometimes, but actors nonetheless, whose "instrument" is their pencil.

"It was the first time I had ever drawn a bird," says Keane, who believes he was picked for the regal eagle precisely for that reason, to give him a challenge. Roy Disney sent Keane off to Boise, Idaho, to meet a man named Morley Nelson, who owns six golden eagles. "I just fell in love with the birds," recalls Keane. "So, I started to get as much footage as possible of the eagles."

A basic rule of animal animation: You've got to love 'em to draw 'em. Nelson's devotion to his own eagles began to rub off on Keane, who photographed them, videotaped them, and, back in his living room, began emulating them, much to the delight of his children, Claire and Max, both of whom like to draw. "My kids see my work in the rough stages along the way. It's funny, I usually get some input from them along the process, to see how they're responding to it. I bring them into the studio, and they draw while I work."

Incorporating his children in his work is something Glen learned early in life from his own father, Bil Keane, who draws the ubiquitous newspaper panel *The Family Circus* (both Keanes discussed their work in the original CS #8). "It was the most natural thing in the world to decide that I was going to draw, too. But I didn't want to do cartoons, like my dad. I wanted to do something more serious. But when I

At his desk, Glen Keane labors over the Beast, "the most interesting character Disney has ever done."

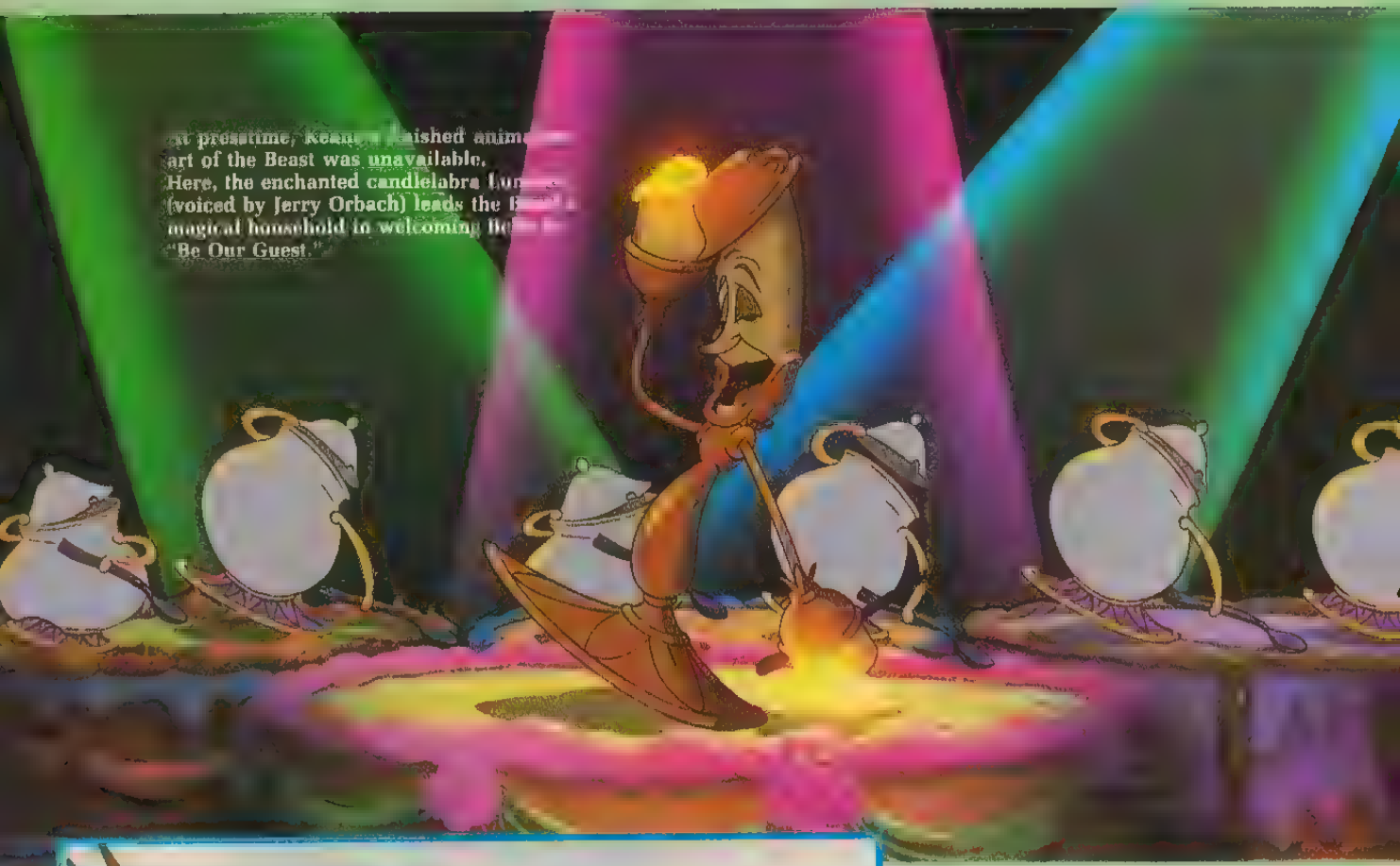
look back on it, so much of what my dad was, and how he approached his work—and he still does it now—has affected how I approach my own work. His thing was to make *The Family Circus* characters so real and believable to him, because they were based on his own family. He drew us doing all that dumb stuff in there. Stupid things I would do would be in the comic strip months later."

The younger Keane joined Disney in 1974, at a time when the deified animators whose work went all the way back to *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* were looking for apprentices to ring in a new generation. "It was a great time to be there," recalls Keane with reverence. "Well, when I got there, they were saying the same things that my dad was saying about his work. *You've got to make this sincere! This isn't sincere enough!* I thought, what in the world does 'sincere' mean?"

He soon found the answer. "You have to believe in your character, find out how much is really you on the screen. So, for every film I've worked on since then, the first stage is to immerse myself so deeply in the character that it *becomes* me."

Keane surrounds himself with photos and drawings on the walls of his office to help him concentrate. A visit to Keane's lavender-painted animation studio in Los Angeles while he was working on *Beauty & the Beast* revealed walls covered with drawings of zoo animals—strong-jawed, mighty-chested

All Beauty & the Beast Art & Photos: Copyright 1991 The Walt Disney Company



...t presstime, Keane ...ished anim... art of the Beast was unavailable. Here, the enchanted candelabra Lu... (voiced by Jerry Orbach) leads the ... magical household in welcoming Be... "Be Our Guest."

Art Copyright 1990 The Walt Disney Company
Photo Robert Isenberg

For *The Rescuers Down Under*, Keane flew as the eagle Marahute, considered one of the finest achievements in recent animation history.

creatures. There are photos of lions, gorillas, buffalo, warthogs, bears, mandrills, "all photos for reminding me of where the Beast comes from in his own genesis." There's a big, stuffed bison head hunkered down on his file cabinet. There's a drawing of a 19th century artist, John Singer Sargent, who looks romantic and brooding and semi-beastly himself. "I don't only put up stuff for the Beast, I put up anything that's going to trigger a feeling in me in my drawings. It may inspire something totally unrelated, but suggests a way of drawing."

To animate a bear fight in *The Fox and the Hound*, Keane plastered his walls with pictures of bears. For *The Little Mermaid*, he had pictures of fish and dolphins, and photos of girls that he cut from teen magazines to study their hair and expressions. For *Rescuers Down Under*, one animator had a monitor lizard in his office, and another was studying footage of kangaroos hopping. "The beginning of a picture is a real interesting time to see an animation studio, because people are exploring, surrounding themselves with inspiration," says Keane.

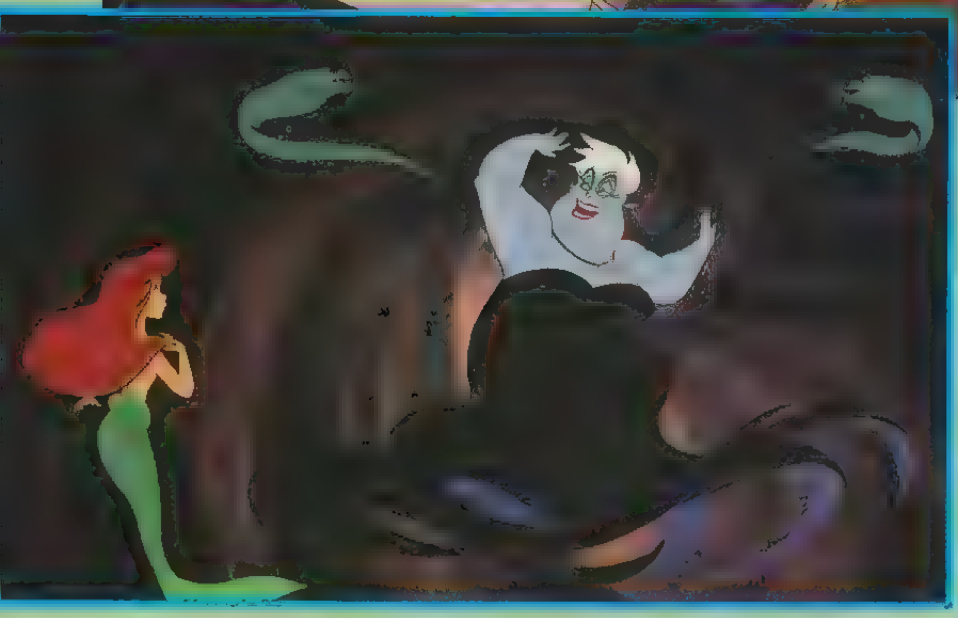
His assignment for *Beauty & the Beast* was to create the selfish prince who's turned into a beast by a curse on his head; the curse will be removed if he can find a woman who loves him. "There's a strong, masculine look to this guy, very American, almost a wrestler type, but not an Arnold Schwarzenegger. When this guy turns from beast to human, there's almost a built-in disappointment factor with the audience. I tried to make him strong, but not overly muscular—just healthy-looking, not macho or anything. Sensitive. He's not doing anything but staring straight into the audience with a confident, calm stare, like, the beast within."

Keane *really* gets into his work. While he was laboring over the eagle, it was Marahute this and Marahute that. Now that he's working on the Beast, he calls it "the most interesting character Disney has ever done."

"Most of our heroes always have some outside obstacle to fight against, like Ariel against Ursula [in *The Little Mermaid*], or Peter Pan against Captain Hook. There's always something outside. But in this movie, the real obstacle is the Beast himself, his own selfish nature. It makes the movie so much more interesting, more challenging."

Coming up with a design for the Beast nearly brought out the beast in Keane himself. "I played with designs where he was

As the perky teapot Mrs. Potts, Angela Lansbury serves both Beauty & the Beast—and sings the title song.



Little Mermaid Art Copyright 1991 The Walt Disney Company

For *The Little Mermaid*, Keane was originally "cast" to draw Ursula. Looking for a change, he became one of Ariel's animators.

ugly, but there has to be the 'cuddle factor,' something soft like a big buffalo, but very beastlike. Otherwise, you could never imagine Belle [the story's heroine] falling in love with this guy."

Eventually, Keane combined a buffalo, boar, gorilla and lion, culling features from each to create a Beast who people could relate to as well.

"I'm getting used to the Beast now; he looks normal to me. I relate so much to him, all the qualities he's feeling, the frustration, the pounding at the door for Belle to come down to dinner when she locks herself in. I know how he's feeling, when my wife does something like that, and I know how he feels when he's feeling insecure and nervous when he's asking Belle if she's happy there with him. I don't look at him as an ugly beast anymore. What an animator feels about a character, the audience feels with him."

One source Keane did *not* use for his design was the TV fantasy adventure *Beauty & the Beast*, which starred Ron Perlman. "I've seen enough of an episode to say this doesn't look very interesting," he says. "Their beast doesn't feel like a beast. He's a guy with some lion makeup on. With animation, you're not limited to sticking beast makeup on a human figure. Mine is basically an animal, his legs shaped more like a wolf; he walks on his toes rather than his heels. His hands are a combination of paw and human hands. He has a tail and his backbone arcs like a bear. You can't do that with a human."

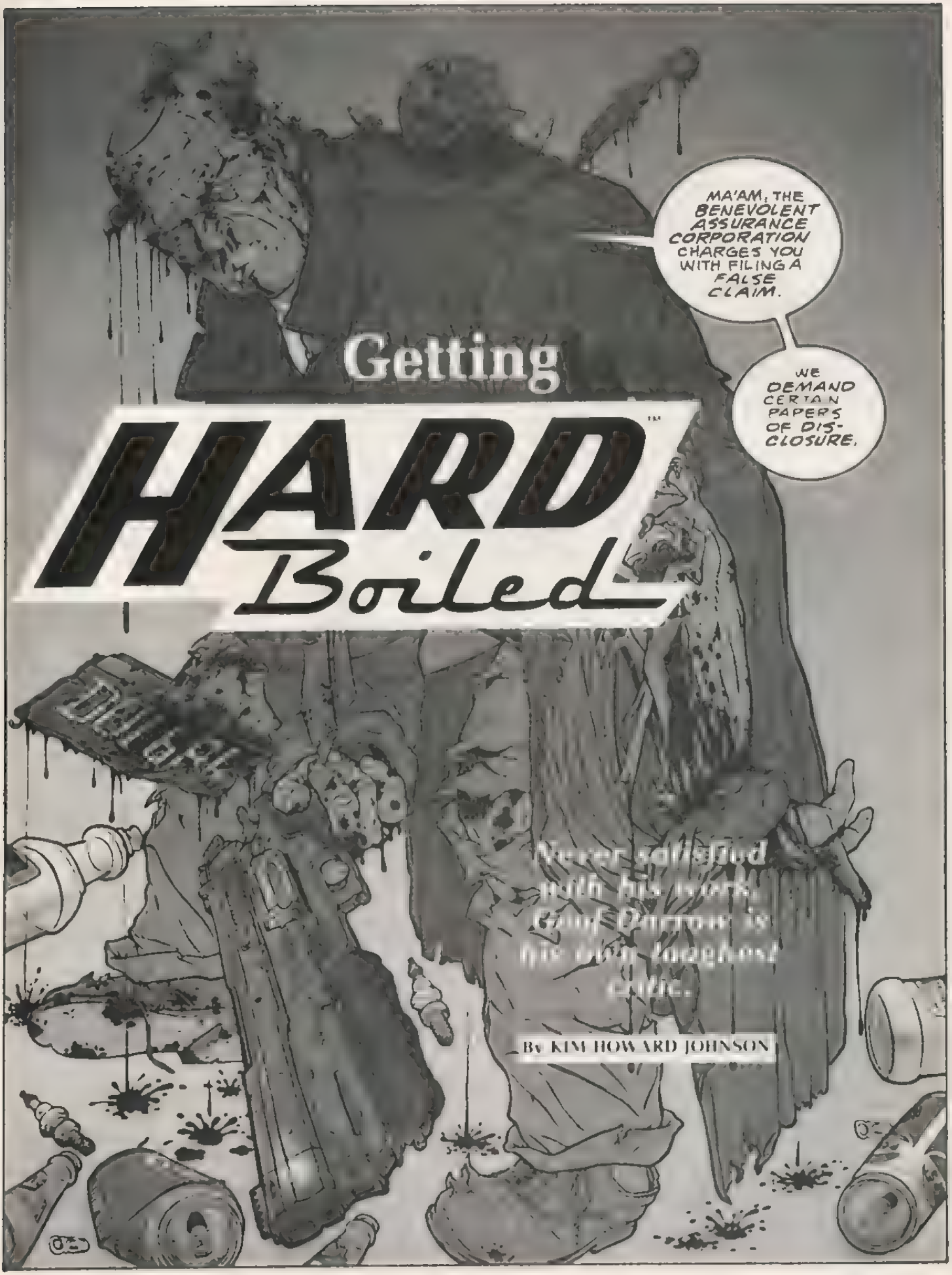
Beauty & the Beast had a long gestation; in fact, Keane and crew had worked on a whole other version of the film in London under a different director. Midway through, Jeffrey Katzenberg decided it lacked a Disney feel, and scrapped it. "There's a Disney tradition to that," says Keane, citing the famous "soup-eating" sequence cut in its entirety from *Snow White*. "Huge sections get thrown out routinely. Yes, people get depressed, you feel totally exhausted when that happens, like all your energy is sapped. I have lots of my work in boxes at home. But you know you want the picture to be the best it can possibly be on the screen."

While a new *Beast* was being worked up, Keane went on to fly like an eagle for *The Rescuers Down Under* (now on video). The eagle, the only character who never speaks, is arguably the best thing about that movie. There's so much attention to detail that Marahute even sports a "nictating membrane," that extra, transparent eyelid that birds have. There are blood vessels in her eyes. Every feather is animated.

To start with, Keane had never animated a bird. If you put out a call for a basset-hound picture, Keane would be the first to volunteer, because every morning he walks two of his own, Ruby and Violet. He teaches an animation class using a videotape of Ruby and Violet licking his wife's face; he plays it in slow motion. "A simple grimace, when put in slow motion, is very funny," he says. "My wife's face first goes into this look of horror, like, *I've got goop on my face!* And then it goes into this incredible wince, like it was the worst pain she has ever gone through, and it just keeps getting *worse and worse and worse!* Everyone was dying laughing on the floor."

But there are no basset hounds in *The Rescuers Down Under*, and to draw an eagle required Keane to get up on that living room chair. He then

(continued on page 60)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Getting
HARD™
Boiled
Never satisfied with his work, Geof Darrow is his own toughest critic.
By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

A little bit of Moebius, a little bit of Jack Kirby—that's how *Hard Boiled* artist Geof Darrow describes his work. Darrow has been laboring away in America and Europe for years, but it's his work on the Frank Miller-scripted mini-series that has gotten him noticed in the U.S.

Hard Boiled may have attracted readers because of Miller, but it was Darrow's slam-bang art that kept them around. The artist says he has known Miller since 1985, which is how he got involved with the project.

"I met him through Moebius," says Darrow. "When Moebius was living in California, he said, 'Do you want to come over? Frank Miller's coming to see me,' and I said, 'Yeah!' "

Darrow had lived in France, and worked with the legendary Moebius (CS #3), and there was a mutual admiration society between the *Hard Boiled* team-to-be. Darrow says he was familiar with Miller's work, and Miller was a fan of his.

"*Hard Boiled*'s violence level isn't any higher than in a regular issue of *The Punisher*," insists artist Geof Darrow.

Hard Boiled Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright © Frank Miller & Geof Darrow

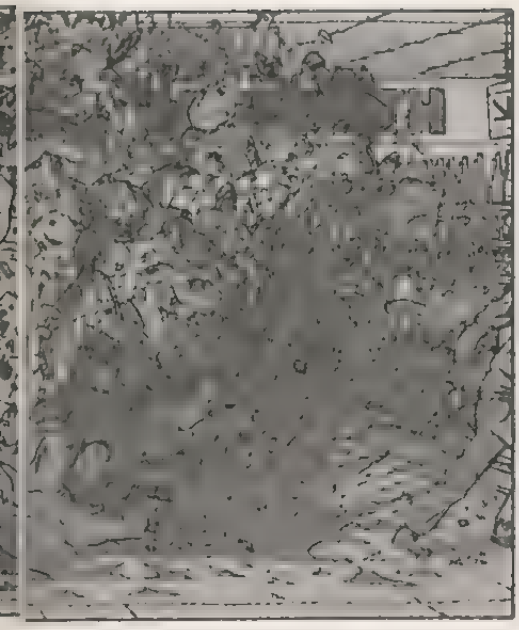
"I sent him a copy of this book I had done in France, and some other work I'd done with Moebius," Darrow explains. "I had been living in France, so when I moved back to Los Angeles, we would go out and see each other socially. We just thought it would be fun to work together. That was a pretty good idea!" he laughs.

When Miller came up with *Hard Boiled*, it was only a short story, about 10 or 15 pages. "As I recall, I did the first page and he really liked it. He said, 'I'm gonna add some stuff. If I make it longer, will you care?' I said, 'Make it as long as you want, I don't care. If you want to make it 10,000 pages, I don't care!' And so, it just grew out of that."

Their collaboration was quite simple. "Frank wrote the words and I drew the pictures! The process was actually rather straightforward. He would just hand the script to me, and I would go off and draw it. I'm pretty secretive, which made things kind of difficult for him. Months would go by and Frank wouldn't see anything. He would say, 'What are you doing?' 'I'm drawing.' 'What?' 'Stuff.' 'OK.' After a while, he just got used to it. I was kind of cagey about things, I was always afraid that he would see what I was doing and go, 'You can't do that!' But he never did. He's great to work with. I wouldn't show it to him, but I would show it to [Miller's wife/colorist] Lynn Varley, who helped out a lot. She's a great person to discuss things with."

Darrow says he's grateful to Miller and Varley, and also Claude Legris, the woman who colored his work.

Once he got the script from [redacted] more or less given free reign. "He didn't say, 'I want you to draw



All Hair Raised Art Good Darrow

When Nixon/Burns/Seltz is in town and on a case, people know it.

FLAPJACKS AND BURGERS BECKY MAKES FOR ME EVERY MORNING AND I NEVER GET SICK OF IT SOME PEOPLE COMPLAIN
ABOUT NOT HAVING ENOUGH VARIETY IN THEIR LIVES NOT ME

The *Hard Boiled* hero would have a perfect home life, if only it were real.

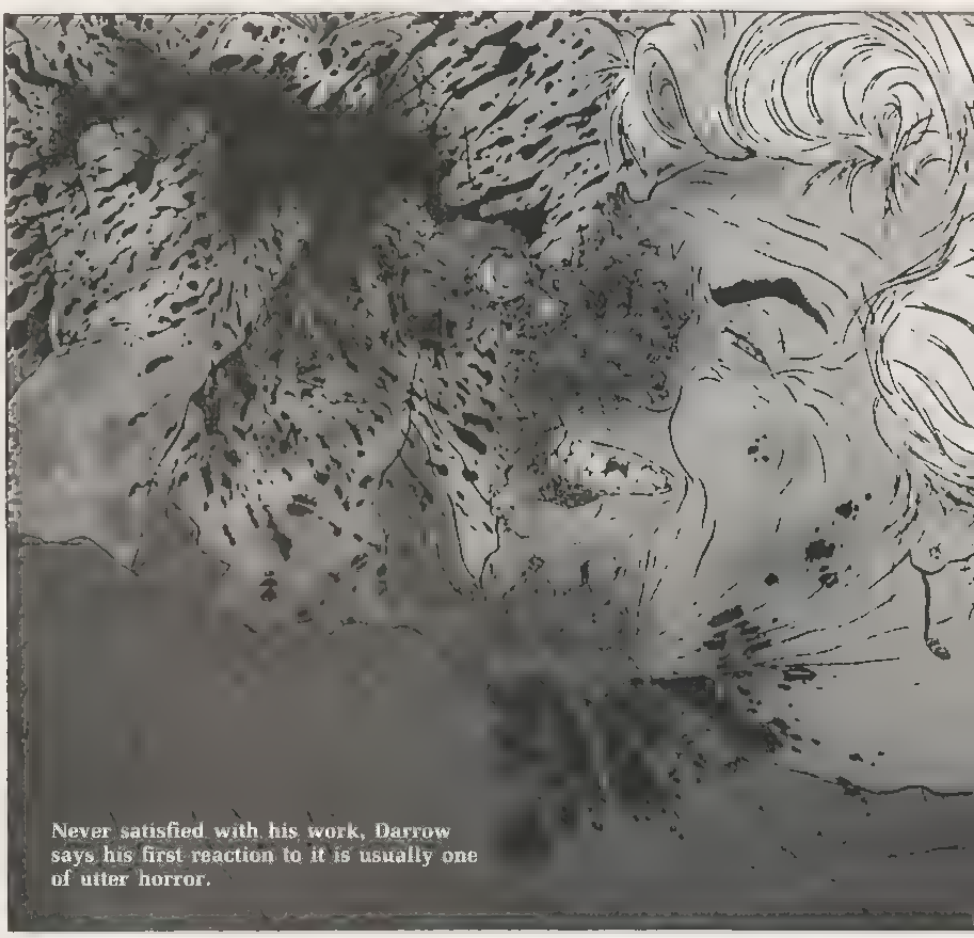
three panels that show this or that.' He's great to work with. It was just 'Take it and do it.' If I don't follow exactly what he has written in terms of the shots, if it works, it's great. He's really, really flexible. Frank's not opposed to my coming up with ideas if it makes it a little wackier."

"Between Frank and me, it's 50-50, and we play off each other. Sometimes I'll just take things, and if he asks for 10 of 'em, I'll give him 50. We each try to outdo the other!"

Their collaboration took place across a longer distance than most. "I started in Los Angeles, and then I moved to France. I've been finishing it over there. Much of *Hard Boiled* #2 was done over there, and most of #3."

Darrow says that, as much as he likes the results, he's never satisfied with his own work. "I like it all. There's a lot of dialogue that Frank has written that I like a lot. About my own work, I don't know. It scares me. I don't like to look at it, because it never turns out the way I want it. I'll look over my old stuff on occasion, and I'll think, 'Well, it's not that bad,' but my first reaction when I see it is usually utter horror. I'm just sort of embarrassed, and I'm afraid Frank will go, 'No, you moron! What did you do that for? We'll be the *embarrassment* of the business! I'll get somebody else to finish this!' " he laughs.

The response—from Miller and from *Hard Boiled* readers—has been far from negative, to Darrow's relief. "They seem to like it. I guess they do, anyway; it sold pretty well," he says modestly. "We get a lot of letters. Some of them are real disturbing, but that happens to everybody, I guess.



Never satisfied with his work, Darrow says his first reaction to it is usually one of utter horror.

Hard Boiled, even more than most of Miller's work, has been criticized by some for its violence, but Darrow says it's causing controversy because they are depicting the *results* of violent actions, rather than the cartoony actions shown in most comics.

"To me, the violence level isn't any higher than in a regular issue of *The Punisher*. The only thing is, you see that the effect of the violence isn't very pretty [in *Hard Boiled*], and I don't think it should be," he says. "I'm from the Sam Peckinpah school. I would rather see something that dis-

Some people would just rather not pay the tax collector called Nixon

Beauty is skin deep, but that isn't the case with Frank Miller and Darrow's hero

turbs me than something that's equally violent, but blood-free, like in some mainstream comics."

Many American fans weren't familiar with Darrow before *Hard Boiled*, but he first became prominent in Europe through his work with Moebius.

"It's the same story as with Frank. We were friends for several years. He saw this comic strip I was working on, *Suburban Threat*, and he wanted to ink it. He said, 'Oh, this will be great, let me ink this!' I thought, 'Well, if he inks it, then I'm a goner. Nobody'll give me credit for anything, and it'll just look beautiful.' So, I said no. But, my publisher at the time came up with the idea of a portfolio that I could draw, and he could ink. That's how *City of Fire* came about. It was a lot of fun. I'm really proud of that, and I'm proud to have worked with Frank. I just hope that I haven't embarrassed myself!" says the overly-modest artist.

Darrow says his style is derived from diverse sources, including Moebius. "There's Moebius, there's Hergé, the guy who used to do *Tintin*, a little bit of Swarte. There's even Jack Kirby—I don't know if you can see it, but it's there, maybe more in the attitude and the panoramic stuff. He was always over the top and giving it 100 percent!"

As might be expected, Darrow was a comics fan when he was a child. "I collected comics when I was a kid, all the Marvels and the Jack Kirby stuff. I read *Superman* and *Batman*, and I liked dinosaur comics, too. I liked those old *Star Spangled War Stories*, army men fighting dinosaurs," he laughs. "Those were the best. Guns and technicolor dinosaurs—they were always real funny colors. I remember seeing red, pink and blue dinosaurs. They could always dispatch 'em pretty easy—a submachine gun's bullets always seemed to find the nerve center and bump 'em off real quick. They were great!"

Darrow is a native of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and studied art at the Chicago Academy, the alma mater of Hal Foster, Walt Disney and Mike Grell. He's currently contemplating a TV project, and may be moving back to Los Angeles from France, but doesn't plan to abandon comics.

"Hopefully, I'll work with Frank again, and also do some stuff on my own. I am gonna do some short stories, based on stories by Andrew [illegible]. They're gonna be written by Jerry Prosser, and published by Dark Horse. They'll come out as I finish them—with my rapidity, it'll be an annual thing!" he laughs.

"I'll always do comics," says Geof Darrow. "They're my first love!" CS

He is terror flapping in the night & on the Disney Afternoon.

DARKWING DUCK

By KYLE COUNTS

I am the terror that flaps in the night. I am the winged scourge that pecks at your nightmares. I am Darkwing Duck!"

His entrance is announced via a cloud of blue smoke. He fells evildoers with his patented web kick and multi-purpose gas gun. And he never misses a PTA meeting.

Come again?

Meet Darkwing Duck, crimebuster extraordinaire—and single father. This fall, the goofball caped crusader debuts as part of the Disney Afternoon line-up, joining *Tale Spin*, *DuckTales* and *Chip 'N Dale's Rescue Rangers*, all highly rated syndicated shows produced by Buena Vista Television.

ABC will broadcast *Darkwing Duck* (already previewed on The Disney Channel) on Saturdays, which means that the animated comedy/adventure series will be seen six days a week for a total of 78 episodes. No doubt that's good news to youngsters, but Gary Krisel, executive vice president of Walt Disney Television Animation, hopes everyone will tune in to observe the antics of this fine-feathered figure of mystery.

What sets Darkwing apart from other superheroes, Krisel points out, is that Darkwing (voiced by the versatile Jim Cummings) is not only a do-gooder and a fighter of crime, he is forced to juggle the domestic responsibilities of being a single parent. As average citizen Drake Mallard, Darkwing shares his suburban abode with his adopted nine-year-old niece, Gosalyn (Christine Cavanaugh), a very independent handful who would rather help Darkwing collar thugs than do her homework. Drake's *Life of Riley* existence also includes the comic-foil family next door, the Muddlefoots—Herb (Cummings), Binkie (Susan Tolsky), Tank (Dana Hill) and Honker (Katie Leigh)—whose buttinski natures pose a constant threat to his secret identity.

In addition to Winnie the Pooh and the Tasmanian Devil, Jim Cummings is the voice behind the bill of *Darkwing Duck*.

His Secret (Duck) Identity

I was always being kicked out of class for making strange noises. Now that's how I make my living—the joke's on them!"

Jim Cummings, the voice of Disney's Darkwing Duck (and his nosy neighbor, Herb Muddlefoot) laughs while recalling his youth spent in Youngstown, Ohio. His future career as a voiceover artist seemed almost predestined.

"As a kid, I was always in plays," says the actor. "I auditioned for the character roles, since they had more appeal for me. I would go out for the role of the old man or the villain or the wizard, rather than the prince.

"In my high school speech class, I specialized in humorous interpretation. [In one competition], I did a cutting from *Guys and Dolls*, one from *Green Pastures* and one from *No Time for Sergeants*. I was always the champ. I was in the paper every week, and I would come home with all these trophies."

Not only is Cummings a man of many voices—he has voiced several characters for assorted Disney shows, including *Tale Spin* (Don Karnage and King Louie the Ape) and *Chip 'N Dale's Rescue Rangers*—he is also an accomplished singer, having worked in a pop band and performed lead vocals as A.C., one of the singing California Raisins.

"It all came together as the years went by," he explains. "I do a lot of singing now. I just did the [vocal for] the theme song for *Taz-Mania* on Thursday mornings, and I also did the [singing] voice of a bad guy pirate in Steven Spielberg's *Hook*. Apparently, I'll be grabbing hold of Robin Williams and scaring him. It was a real pleasure being conducted by John Williams."

Cummings has had no formal training to speak of ("just a good ear"), other than an animation workshop he took six years ago that stressed character development. But he by no means "fell" into the business of voicing cartoon characters. It was a career goal since childhood.

"Certainly, Paul Winchell was one of my early idols. He had *The Paul Winchell-Jerry Mahoney Show* in the '50s, and I thought it was great. I also idolized Mel Blanc, Daws Butler and Paul Frees. I just knew that some where at the end of those crazy car toons they did, somebody was having a good old time. And *I* wanted to be that guy."

His life in Toontown began when he sent an audition tape to animator Don Bluth at Disney. While Bluth—soon to quit the studio to form his own company—had no work for him at the time, Cummings was eventually called in to read for the part of Lionel the Lion, for the Disney Channel series *Dumbo Circus*. He played Lionel for the show's initial 120-episode run, which kept him busy for a year-and-a-half. By that time he had found an agent and was working steadily in TV and radio commercials. "There was a Cinderella element to it all," Cummings beams.

Since then, the performer has done voiceovers for "a million things," including *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (as "a couple of extraneous weasels" and the "Andy Devine bullet" in Eddie Valiant's Toon gun), *The Little Mermaid* and such shows as *DuckTales*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Widget*, *Denver the Last Dinosaur*, *Bobby's World*, *Transformers*, *Rude Dog* and *Dweebs*. In *Taz-Mania* (see page 9), he plays four regulars: The Tasmanian Devil, Buddy Boar, Wendel T. Wolf and Bushwhacker Bob—which often requires him to "yell at myself, push myself off cliffs, get into fights with myself, hit myself over the head and tell myself I'm sorry." He'll also be part of Disney's *Goof Troop*, which premieres in fall 1993.

With two Emmys (for his work as both Winnie the Pooh and Tigger in Disney's *New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*) already to his credit, Jim Cummings is definitely making good on Disney's claim that he is the studio's answer to Mel Blanc—a comparison he humbly downplays, while admitting "it's *very* complimentary, though I don't know that I would ever say that about myself.

"I have so many friends who have famous faces. But it's not all that much fun for them," he observes. "They can't go out to a movie without being bugged, things like that. I'm in the same business, I probably make similar money, but I don't have the headaches. That's a good place to be."

—*Kyle Counts*

"I asked someone on the show to jot down for me a one-sentence description of Darkwing," Krisel says, "and one of our writers came up with, 'Darkwing is a disastrous, determined, dynamic duck doing difficult, dangerous deeds of derring-do, daunting the dingy, demented denizens dominating the despicable domains of darkness.' In other words, all that stands between the good citizens of St. Canard and the town's criminal element is our hero, Darkwing Duck."

Darkwing regularly accepts assignments from SHUSH, "an international agency too secret to name." SHUSH's rival organization, F.O.W.L. (Fiendish Organization of World Larceny) has among its roster some of Darkwing's most formidable foes, including Megavolt, a human electrical generator; Quackerjack, a mad toy maker; and Bushroot, a mutant half plant, half-duck.

Animation veteran Tad Stones, the show's creator, story editor and co-supervising producer (with director Alan Zaslove), says that eagle-eyed fans of the Disney Afternoon will have already spotted Darkwing Duck—in the two-hour programming block's opening credits.

"If you look quick, you'll see Darkwing in the titles—he was in there from day one," reveals Stones. "When the pencils come in to draw the characters, they draw Darkwing, but he doesn't quite get painted in. Gosalyn's in there too, when the letters are all bouncing around."

The inevitable question is posed to Stones: Why a duck?

"Looking back on it, I don't know 'why a duck,' " he replies. "On the other hand, why *not* a duck? Probably, it was because we had developed a spy thing called *Double-O Duck*, which we liked for the alliteration alone. It was great if you had seen all the James Bond films, but

All Darkwing Duck Art & Photos. Copyright 1991 The Walt Disney Company

Aided by niece Gosalyn, neighbor Honker Muddlefoot and sidekick Launchpad, Darkwing Duck strikes fear into the hearts of evildoers.

what about the kids who haven't? In my brain, the duck was probably just a carryover. We talked about the Shadow and the Green Hornet and creating a pulp kind of feeling.

"In *Chip 'N Dale's Rescue Rangers* [on which Stones served as co-producer and supervising story editor], you had a straight man surrounded by crazies. I thought it would be fun to have a crazy surrounded by crazies. We talked about doing an adventure show. My own feeling was to do a show that dealt with a single character, one guy who was undeniably the show's star.

"[After *Double-O Duck*], I went back to my comic books—back to the days when they wrote simpler stories that you could understand. I also went back to *The Flash* and *Green Lantern*, the Silver Age of comics where you could pick up an issue and *not* be lost—the continuity was there. I wanted to do that in a show because I feel that cartoons have become so continuity-oriented. I guess it's what they're trying to do with Impact Comics: Get back to the basic, 'let's have fun' approach," says Stones.

What makes *Darkwing* different from the other Disney Afternoon shows, Stones says, is its humor. "The other shows grew more and more toward doing a feature film in a little package. We went the opposite direction with *Darkwing*. I didn't want a short feature film, I wanted a long, short subject. Tell a simple story, illustrate it with the broadest gags possible. Design-wise, I didn't want much detail in the backgrounds; I wanted sparse designs that highlighted the characters. I wanted brighter colors, crazier voices. We really designed the show every step of the way in terms of whatever would contribute best to the comedy."

Honker would prefer it if Gosalyn spent more time on her homework and less on helping Darkwing Duck fight crime.

Adds Zaslove, Stones' partner on *Gummi Bears* and *Rescue Rangers*, "We've made a strong effort to get much broader [in *Darkwing Duck*], more gag-oriented, at the same time trying to maintain a strong storyline.

"As the show developed, it presented an opportunity to be considerably more zany in its execution. So, our first episode is fairly straight. But by the third, fourth and fifth episodes, it gets much broader, even sillier. There's one coming up called 'Comic Book Caper,' where the characters literally go in and out of comic books. It gets pretty damn wild.

"They say that Walt never made a film for a child. Our approach is pretty much the same. We try to appeal to a broad spectrum of viewers."

Darkwing Duck joins *DuckTales*, *Chip 'N Dale's Rescue Rangers* and *Tale Spin* on the Disney Afternoon this fall.

Wild" and "fun" are the two words you'll hear most often when Stones and Zaslove discuss *Darkwing Duck*. Explains Stones, "We approached it as a comedy/adventure with simple storylines, illustrated with gags going back to the classic short subjects. Like Mickey Mouse: He could be a whaler in one, and then a billboard cleaner, a suburbanite, a cowboy. We keep the basic continuity, but within that, we have a lot of fun.

"For instance, in 'A Brush with Oblivion,' Darkwing, Gosalyn and Launchpad [Darkwing's sidekick, a character seen on *DuckTales*] end up having an adventure inside a painting by Salvador Dali," adds Stones. "In another episode, 'Planet of the Capes,' Darkwing is taken into outer space to a world where everyone is superpowered *except* him, and he must take the role of the ordinary guy, who everybody else has to save. In 'Aduckyphobia,' he grows four extra arms [as Spider-Man once did] and becomes the wall-crawling arachnaduck. In another show, we turn him into a dinosaur—a duck-billed dinosaur, of course. In 'Paraducks,' he goes back into the '50s and meets himself."

And then there's "Night of the Living Spud," a story, as Stones outlines it, of "true love, true fear and a vampire potato."

"This episode features the character Bushroot, who I think is going to

Tad Stones created *Darkwing Duck* with the same "pulp kind of feeling" found in The Shadow and the Green Hornet.

Drake Mallard's secret identity is in constant danger of being discovered by neighbors Herb and Binkie Muddlefoot.

be one of the show's most popular villains," Stone predicts. "Bushroot is a mutant plant duck. Once he was Dr. Reginald Bushroot, a nerdy research scientist. He was experimenting with grafting chlorophyll onto animal cells so people could just snack on sunlight. However, his funding was cut, he experimented on himself, and he became this ambulatory eggplant that can control all plant life—flowers, trees, whatever. He can make ivy vines slither like snakes, he can make oak trees become living battering rams, or cactus plants fire their needles like a machine gun.

"Unfortunately, he's a terrible villain; he's really lousy at it. I think it's his low self-esteem. He may be a mutant plant duck, but inside he's still a nerd. In fact, in this episode, Bushroot tries to grow a loving, supportive helpmate, someone who'll build his confidence and be his bride for life. However, when his assistant throws in potato peels instead of flower petals, he creates Posey, a vampire potato that goes roving the countryside sucking the starch out of people and turning them into...couch potatoes. So, there's only one duck who can prevent the vampire potato from turning the rest of the populace into a nation of french fries, and that's Darkwing Duck."

Not only is the humor broader, but the animation style employed by the series is also quite different from the rest of the Disney Afternoon line-up. Zaslove says, "We specifically made an effort to be much faster and crisper here in terms of timing, given the kind of story structure involved. So, we have scenes where a safe falls on Darkwing and squashes him, and he comes back up and he's fine. We've never really done that in our other shows. It's almost exactly the opposite of the timing concept of *Tale Spin*, which was done very literally. Here, the sound FX are very cartoony and the action, not literal in many cases. Everything sets up a really silly gag."

Being that Stones is a comic book aficionado and Zaslove has 35 years of experience in animation, including stints at UPA and Hanna-Barbera, it makes sense that Darkwing leads a Bruce Wayne kind of life: Ordinary Joe by day, masked crimefighter by night. But both men reject the notion that they've patterned Darkwing after Batman.

"There may be some asides that suggest [such a comparison]," counters Zaslove, "but *no* intention was ever made to parody Batman. As far as being a crimefighter and having gadgetry at his disposal, that's just generic superhero stuff. The Green Hornet has all that, too. We're just working within the genre, playing it out in our own fashion."

Offers Stones: "Darkwing Duck has no super powers. OK, who else is a nighttime adventurer that doesn't have super powers? Hmmmmm. Could it be...Batman? In *Batman*, the boy's parents are killed in front of him. I don't know how much stronger you can do that emotionally, and I don't know how to do a comedic take on that.

"Why do an origin story you've seen before? What I delight in doing is putting a twist on things you've seen over and over again. Every cartoon show does a vampire story, but we're the first with a vampire *potato*," boasts Stones.

OK, maybe Darkwing is only the Dark Knight's distant cousin. But how do Stones and Zaslove respond to the suggestion that Darkwing—who likes to "look good while doing good"—is nothing more than a, uh, *homage* to Daffy Duck (and his crimebusting alter-ego, the "Mathsked" Avenger), that the series is Disney's attempt to redo the classic Warner Bros. cartoons?

Scoffs Zaslove, "Tad found a drawing of Daffy Duck in the early days that looked like Donald Duck, only he was black in color. No attempt was made to [copy Daffy in our show] at all—quite the contrary. If anything, he's more like Roger Rabbit—the shape of the head and all."

As for this being Disney's try at "doing" Warner Bros., Zaslove says, "I started as a kid at Warner Bros. My background was as an animator and director for UPA, where I really learned animation. I know the different styles, believe me. But no attempt was made [to emulate Warner Bros.]. Why not accuse us of stealing from MGM? Tex Avery directed there, as well as at Warner Bros. If someone wants to draw that comparison, that's up to them. I'm saying that no attempt was made to copy the Warner Bros. style. In fact, we tried to *avoid* it."

"Darkwing is his own unique character," adds Stones. "From day one, I was concerned about [comparisons to Daffy]. Obviously, whenever you do a duck character, the comparisons will be there. There's Donald, there's Daffy—you can't help ending up [resembling them], design-wise, one way or another. But Daffy and Darkwing are different characters. Daffy never got the chance to do what Darkwing Duck does. *Darkwing* tells 22-minute stories; he has this personal life; he has this warmth; he cares about Gosalyn. Daffy, in his funniest shows, gets greedier and more self-centered.

"One critic got on us for the way Darkwing plays to the camera like Daffy Duck does. Well, he does, I can't argue that. But it seems to me that Laurel and Hardy did a lot of that

(continued on page 60)

Since the *Tintin* animated series follows Hergé's drawing style closely, "there's lots to look at," says Dennise Fordham.

All Tintin Art: Copyright 1991 Hergé/Courtesy Nelvana

Tintin, Hergé's famous hero, visits the land of cartoon adventurers.

By PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

In Nelvana's Toronto office, where Hergé's famous *Tintin* books are being adapted into a half-hour animated TV series, there is a maze of winding corridors and cramped offices, full of people buzzing over computers, editing tables, VCRs and hi-tech telephones. *Tintin* story editor Dennise Fordham—with her long blonde and bright smile shining through her dimly lit office—offers a progress report on the series debuting this fall.

"The project felt like a bit of a mess to me when production kicked off in January," Fordham says. "I didn't

know if I could make it work, but it wasn't because the work wasn't done. I had one script ready and we were set to go ahead with 12 more. We do them in batches of 13. Nelvana was in development with the French [Ellipse Programmes] for a year before I came onto *Tintin*, though no one really knew how the series was going to evolve. Every series changes once you get into it. You find that one character doesn't work or you find something about a character you really like and you go with it. But it felt like a mess because it was new to me. I worked on the last cycle of *Babar*, and before that, I was assistant story editor on *T n T*, so I had so much to learn about writing for animation."

Fordham taps her keyboard casing thoughtfully. "We get many writers who come in thinking they can write for animation because it's just a cartoon. I try to give new, young writers a chance whenever I can, but animation is *very* specialized. It's harder to write than live action. There are only certain ways you can play a gag out visually. For example, there are a lot of great chases in this material, but how do you do chase after chase and still do something new?

"This show is particularly tough to write. We're hampered by the books, many of which are so convoluted. I take a lot out I have to—but I don't lose the story."

Fordham picks up a copy of Hergé's *The Land of Black Gold* and thumbs through it. "What we might do, particularly on a book like this one where the story is so complex, is take out some of the twists and turns," she says. "We don't have time for them. The dialogue needs to be shortened, too. We don't want talking heads. The audience may be sophisticated, but they *are* kids. We can't get too complicated like in a book. The show goes so fast."

Only two of the 13 62-page *Tintin* adventures (*Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Shooting Star*) are being done as single shows. The other adventures, each being adapted as two complete episodes, are *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, *The Secret of the Unicorn*, *Cigars of the Pharoah*, *The Blue Lotus*, *The Calculus Affair*, *The Broken Ear*, *King Ottokar's Scepter*, *Tintin in Tibet*, *Flight 714*, *Land of Black Gold* and *Tintin and the Picaros*.

"We write the scripts as 22-minute segments. So, we find a place in the story where we can wrap it up naturally, making it appear to end," adds Fordham. "The second segment starts with Tintin going into a flashback and then we pick up the story from that point. That way, the episodes can be aired in any order."

Fordham promises the animated series will move faster than the Hergé books.

The books have also been modernized. "We've had to update them, mainly the dialogue," she says. "Most of these books were written in the 1940s, so some of the dialogue is stilted today, especially Tintin's. He'll say something like 'Oh, I think we should look into this investigation and search further, Snowy.' We'll make him sound more '90s; 'Let's look into this. Let's go!' We use a lot of contractions because that's how people speak."

Fordham says the violence inherent in the stories will be handled very delicately when adapting the material for kids. "We have people getting shot, people getting beat up," she notes. "We edit so that when someone is hit on the head, you see the stick coming down, but not making contact. No one dies in these episodes, except where the story demands it. Whenever we can, we just injure them."

Also, good guys of the '90s aren't allowed to smoke and drink the way they were in the '40s. "It's a bad example for kids," says Fordham, "so we tone all that down. We've made our good guys good and our bad guys really bad. We do two different versions of each show, one for the (Canadian) Family Channel and one for our other clients. The Family Channel doesn't want *any* reference to drugs and booze. For the Family Channel version of *The Crab with the Golden Claws* [about drug smuggling], we dubbed in the word 'diamond' so instead of drug smugglers we have diamond smugglers. In the dialogue, there's very little mention of drugs and we shot it so you never see them up close. Everyone else is perfectly agreeable to the books."

The *Tintin* books, drawn by the Belgian artist Hergé, have been popular with adults for years. The

Going on boat rides by himself is just one of the adult things Tintin does that appeals to kids, Fordham says.

Tintin (pronounced, roughly, *tan-tan*) adventures have appeal because they're sophisticated, fast-paced and set in exotic locales steeped in innocent nostalgia. The drawing is packed with historical, geographical and technical detail. In recasting the stories for children, Fordham isn't worried that her work will fail to find its audience.

"First of all, everybody can relate to the Tintin character," she explains. "He's a kid, though we don't know what age. He does things an adult can do. He can jump in a car or a plane, but he doesn't have the restrictions of parents. That's half the appeal. We emphasize his job more than the books do—he's a reporter. It gives him a motivation in his adventures—he's going after the story."

Nelvana's Chairman Michael Hirsch points out that *Tintin* began in '19 in a kids' magazine, *Le Vingtieme Siecle* (*The Twentieth Century*). "The originals were comic books, the natural medium to adapt to animation."

Fordham adds, "You can take these stories as political satire, but at bottom they're rollicking action-adventure. Kids love that. They may not catch the subtleties, but they'll be able to follow the story. It's good guys versus bad guys with a lot of fights and chases along the way. Adults will get a little more out of it. Besides, we're not taking out *all* the gags. People who read these books as kids will tune in to see if we've mucked it up, to see if we've been loyal to the books, and we have, so I think we can pull in quite a varied audience.

"For one thing, we're drawing it in period, just as it is in the books," adds Fordham. "Tintin hasn't changed. The period costumes are correct. There are 1940s-style telephones and cars. The bad guys wear hats. It looks like a more innocent time. Since we're keeping close to Hergé's drawing style, there's lots to look at. The jungle scenes, for example, have *all* the crocodiles and snakes.

"We have toned down some things from the books that would be considered racist today," Fordham says. "For example, in *The Broken Ear*, Tintin goes undercover as the cook on a ship and wears blackface like Al Jolson. That's offensive to today's audience. Tintin is very respectful of other cultures. He's very polite and he tries to follow their methods and customs, and we've kept that."

"We're adapting old classics," adds Hirsch. "The books are up to 60 years old. We're being as sensitive as we can. I think they'll be acceptable to everybody."

"The Thompson twins are still English," explains Fordham, "and the foreign characters speak in the accents of whatever country they come from, especially the bad guys. We've kept Captain Haddock as is, despite the alcohol problem. In the show where we introduce him, Tintin reforms him and he swears off alcohol, so we get away with it even though, throughout the books, Haddock keeps trying to sneak a drink. But many times, it isn't important to the story, so we drop it because there isn't time to play it out. Actually, Haddock is my favorite character; he's so hotheaded and he shouts long strings of outrageous insults at people. You can have fun with him; he's a great character. Tintin's sort of faceless. Haddock brings him alive by giving him something to react to."

When the *Tintin* project was first brought to Nelvana by Ellipse Programmes in Paris, the company was immediately interested. "They were our coproduction partners on *Babar* and *Rupert Bear*," Hirsch notes, "so we looked on the project favorably. Also, we had all been *Tintin* fans for years. The *Tintin* books were classic comics. Comics fans are aware of the titles, the quality of the artwork and their place in comics history. So, we were fascinated. We had tremendous success with classic characters like *Babar* [Nelvana's currently adapting *Chester Cheetah* for the Fox Network.] and we thought we could do the same with *Tintin*."

Though a mild-mannered reporter, Tintin isn't a modern comics superhero. Neither is he like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* or *G.I. Joe*. Based in pre-World War II Europe, he lacks the space-age appeal of *Droids* and Alf's zany otherworldliness. Yet Nelvana apparently had no doubts that an animated *Tintin* would be successful on North American television.

"We have the credentials," says Hirsch. "We're a leader in bringing classic characters to the screen. The

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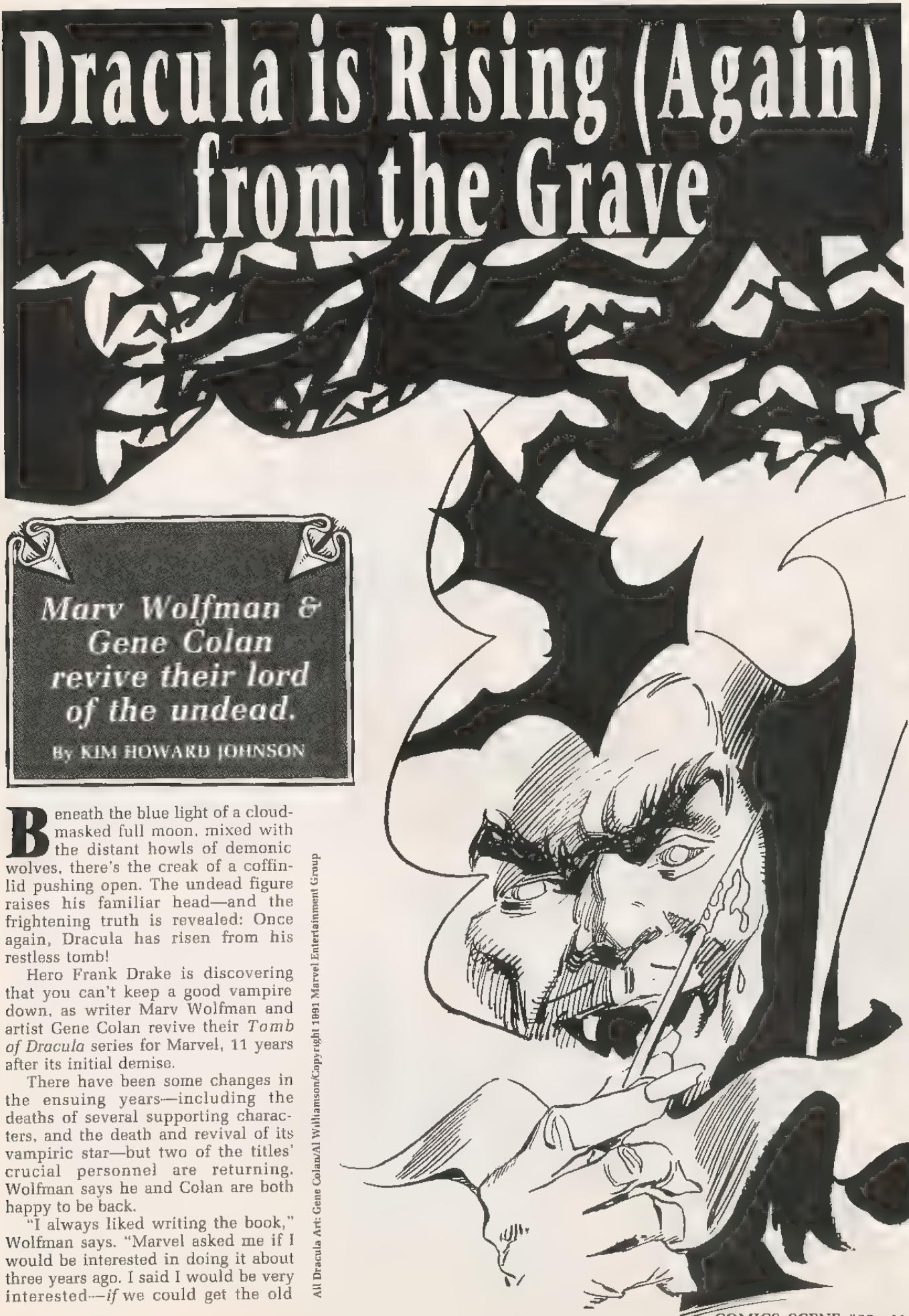
Dracula is Rising (Again) from the Grave



Marv Wolfman & Gene Colan revive their lord of the undead.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Beneath the blue light of a cloud-masked full moon, mixed with the distant howls of demonic wolves, there's the creak of a coffin-lid pushing open. The undead figure raises his familiar head—and the frightening truth is revealed: Once again, Dracula has risen from his restless tomb!

Hero Frank Drake is discovering that you can't keep a good vampire down, as writer Marv Wolfman and artist Gene Colan revive their *Tomb of Dracula* series for Marvel, 11 years after its initial demise.

There have been some changes in the ensuing years—including the deaths of several supporting characters, and the death and revival of its vampiric star—but two of the titles' crucial personnel are returning. Wolfman says he and Colan are both happy to be back.

"I always liked writing the book," Wolfman says. "Marvel asked me if I would be interested in doing it about three years ago. I said I would be very interested—*if* we could get the old

All Dracula Art: Gene Colan/Al Williamson/Copyright 1991 Marvel Entertainment Group

I KNEW WW WHERE DRACULA WASSS BECAUSE I HAD A RAPPORT WITH H MMMM
J.SSSST AS MINALAAA HARKERRRR DID ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO
THAT S HOW I LEDDD FRANK TO H.MMM THEN..
THAT S HOW I K'LLED HIM. THENNNN

Frank's new wife, Marlene, learns the details of Dracula's long-ago demise in a dream/flashback sequence, narrated by the now-dead Rachel Van Helsing.

team together. There wasn't a logical reason to do it without them. I plotted the first part three years ago, but Gene was very busy, and it took him about a year-and-a-half to get to it. He started drawing it, and I plotted the second part about a year ago. Now we're putting it all together."

Wolfman has always been interested in reviving *Dracula*, but the timing wasn't right—until now. "The vampire mythology has always been popular, but like everything else, it's cyclical. Vampires seem to be 'in,' and *Tomb of Dracula* was considered to be a 'classy' book, one of the first of the more adult-type comics. If you're going to do a vampire book, you may as well do a good one," he says.

Vampires are once again "hot" in comics and novels, as evidenced by the success of the Anne Rice books and Apple Comics' *Dracula* series (CS #10). Wolfman agrees that it's a trend. "There's a ton of vampire material out there. Every publisher is doing something with vampires. People are making movies again. This type of material is always of interest because of the subject matter. People generally like horror," Wolfman explains.

Since the original *Tomb of Dracula*'s cancellation in 1979, the series has grown in the memories of its fans, but Wolfman says he never tried to revive the title.

"It never occurred to me. I finished it back in 1979, and I felt like I didn't have anything else to say at that point. But, give it a decade, and new ideas come, new presentations. In the interceding decade, other types of horror became popular, different from the stuff we're doing, and it brought out new ideas and thoughts."

Still, Marv Wolfman had some trepidations about reviving a classic series. "For me, it certainly wasn't a classic—it was the way I learned to write comics," he says. "Though I had been writing *before* I did *Tomb of Dracula*, I gained a full experience on that book. The eight years I was at Marvel coincides with the eight years I was on the title. That book was always a learning process in how to write and compose stories and series.

"The only fear I had, and it was a major one," Wolfman adds, "was similar to what Steve Ditko told me about Spider-Man. He said *nothing* he did today would be thought of as good as the stuff he had done back then, whether it was or not. I think peoples' memories of *Tomb of Dracula* will always be better than anything I could produce today. It was the very first time that sort of horror had been done in comics—there had never been series horror. We tried an adult approach on that book, as much as the 1970s would allow. We tried to do things different from what anybody else was doing. Comics have since moved far beyond that in terms of graphic violence and horror, so what was totally original back then always has the danger of looking old today. I get the feeling that if I handle it wrong, people will say, 'He can't even write the way he used to write.'

"Also, it's 11 years later, and my writing style has evolved. I'm not as purple [as in "purple prose"] as I used to be. Those captions in the old *Tomb of Dracula* were phenomenally

After 11 years, *Tomb of Dracula* is back—and, whew!—is he thirsty! Writer Marv Wolfman and artist Gene Colan hope they can live up to fans' memories of the original classic.

purple, bordering on the ultra-violet! I don't write like that anymore.

"The only problem I had with *Tomb of Dracula* was that I was never an individual story writer. I was plotting a *series*," says Wolfman.

With the first new four-issue *Dracula* series in the can, Wolfman feels he's just getting into the groove again. "I would love to do a second one, because this is the first time in more than a decade that I touched the character, and I think the first one will suffer from insecurity and experimentation. If I were to do a second one, I think I would write a stronger story. The story is good here, but it's new—I need to get back into the character to make it as good as it can be."

This *Tomb of Dracula* will be a 48-page Prestige Format title, with fully painted art. This time around, much of the plot focuses on Frank Drake, one of the protagonists of the original series.

"When Frank was with Rachel Van Helsing in the old days of *Tomb of Dracula*, he was saved from committing suicide in about the third issue. He followed Rachel from that point on with nothing of his own. Her fight became his fight. Now, years later, he still hasn't found out what Frank Drake is about. He still has nowhere to go. Rachel has been killed in *X-Men*, and Frank has married someone else. This is Frank's redemption. By the end of this story, he has a goal."

But what about The Prince of Darkness? "There *is* a Dracula plot, but to me, it's *secondary* to the story about Frank and his wife," explains Wolfman.

Although the supporting cast has dwindled (in addition to Rachel Van Helsing, Quincy Harker died in the final issue of *Tomb of Dracula*), they appear briefly in flashbacks, according to Wolfman. "We have to establish the situation before we can move ahead. I have to assume many readers buying this book have *never* read an issue of *Tomb of Dracula*."

The only other supporting character returning will be Wolfman's vampire-hunting Blade.

"Blade is a complete psycho looney-tune. Here is a man who was essentially *born* fighting vampires—Dracula killed his mother *while she was giving birth*," he says.

"In Marvel mythology, vampires vanished for years. Dracula was killed, therefore Blade's goal was gone. He'd had *nothing* to do with Dracula's death—he wasn't even there. Secondly, all vampires vanished, so he didn't have a purpose. He went stark crazy—bordering on crazy, anyway. He became a total looney, and that's where we pick him up."

"There is a Dracula plot," says Wolfman, "but to me, it's *secondary* to the story about Frank and his wife."

HE USED A SILVER SPOKE FROM HIS WHEEL CHAIR
THAT CRIPPLED FOOL BUILT AN ARSENAL ABOUT HIMSELF WHILE I EXISTED ARMED ONLY WITH MY OWN WIT
HE STABBED AT ME AGAIN AND AGAIN, BUT I WAS NOT DETERRED

Flashback to 1979's last issue: The final confrontation between Drac and Quincy Harker. "Vampires seem to be 'in,' " says Wolfman.

This time around, *Dracula* isn't subject to the limitations of the Comics Code, and Wolfman says they're going to take full advantage of that fact. "We're very clearly non-Code," he laughs. "It's far more sexually explicit. We always had a great deal of sexual tension in the book, and it was always up-front, but we couldn't show anything. Now, we can take it a little bit further.

"Gene has made the violence very

MARLENE? MARLENE?
STOP HIM! DAMMIT, STOP HIM!
DON'T LET HIM DO THIS!
THERE! JUST AS RACHEL SAID
HARKER PLUNGED THE SPOKE INTO DRACULA'S HEART, BUT BEFORE HE COULD SEVER THE HEAD AND KILL THE VAMPIRE FOR GOOD -
--THE DYNAMITE EXPLODED
THE CASTLE WALLS CAME DOWN
MARLENE? MY GOD, MARLENE HOW COULD YOU--

strong," Wolfman adds. "Again, we're in a different world. We pushed the border as far as we could in the '70s. I have no intention of pushing quite as far this time. I think things have gotten far too graphic. Horror is a mental situation, not just reaching in and digging out guts."

Wolfman will be respecting the established continuity for Marvel Universe characters. "This issue picks up 11 years after the last issue of *Tomb of Dracula*. It takes into account that Rachel was killed in *X-Men*, and that vampires were eliminated from Marvel mythology. *Tomb of Dracula* was always a Marvel comic book; it never stood on its own."

Although the new series reunites Wolfman and Colan, Wolfman points out that they've frequently teamed throughout the past decade. "Gene and I did *Night Force* at DC after *Tomb of Dracula*, and coincidentally enough, Gene and I also did a four-page *Goofy* story in the last issue of that title, 'The Tomb of Goofula. It was inked by Tom Palmer, colored by Michele Wolfman and lettered by John Costanza—all of whom handled the original book. So, I've worked with Gene on and off consistently throughout the years."

The upcoming series will see an infusion of new blood on the creative end, however. "Only Gene and I are returning. I was surprised to find out that Al Williamson was inking the new series. In terms of the team, I would have liked Tom Palmer to have inked it, but I saw the first issue by Al, and it's beautiful. Al is a master craftsman and a brilliant artist. His stuff resembles Gene's pencils, and is enhancing what Gene brings to each page. It's a completely different look, and over the first three issues it's some of the best of Gene's work that I've seen since the original *Tomb of Dracula* run."

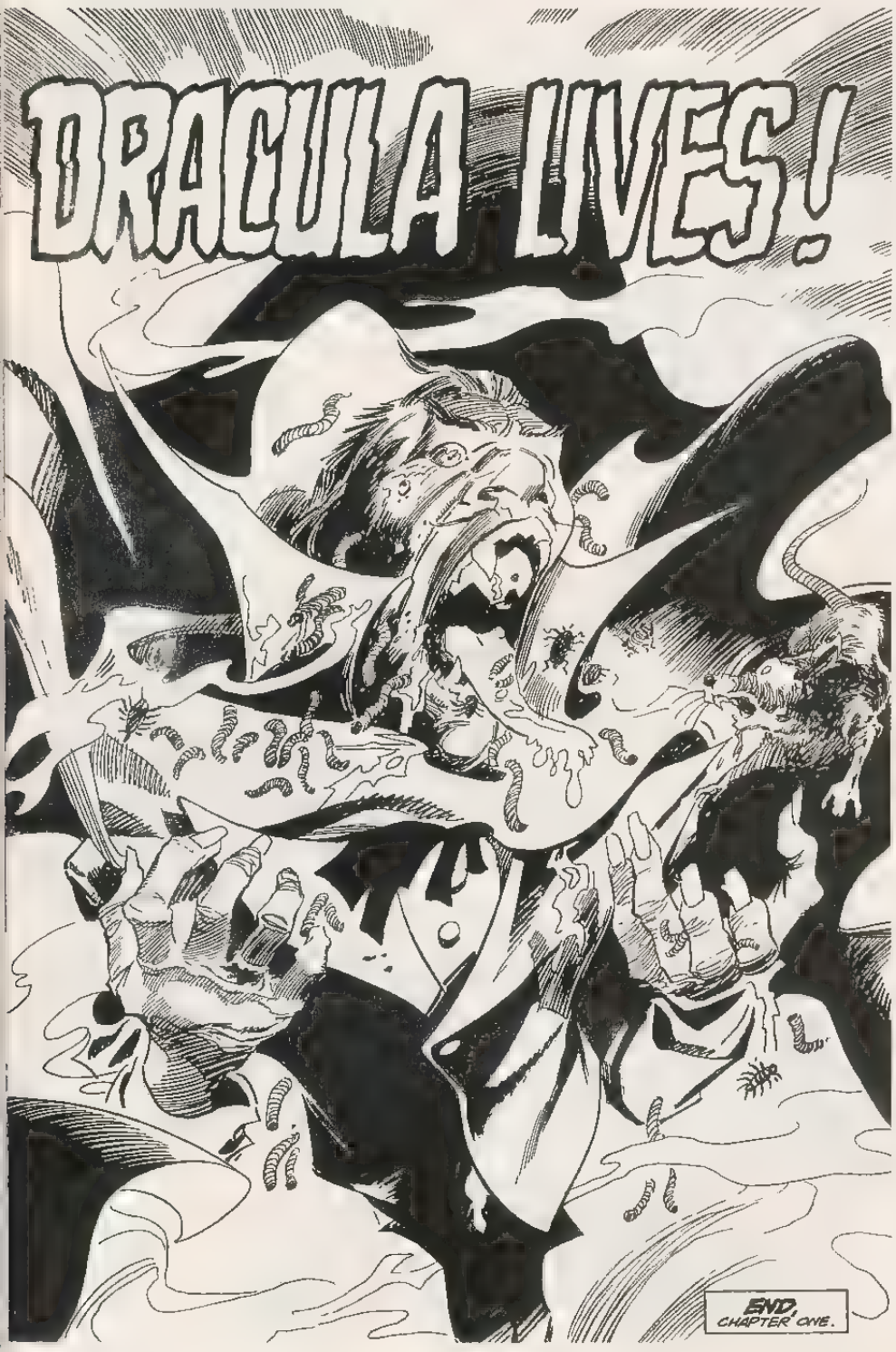
Despite a decade-long layoff from the characters, Wolfman had little trouble re-discovering them. "When I finally sat down to dialogue it, I was amazed at how easily it came back to me. It was like I had never left the characters. The only difference is, I don't write heavy captions anymore, and I don't write as melodramatically. But, in terms of the characters, the writing is more precise. I know more about what I am doing than when I was writing the monthly book."

If the new series is successful, Wolfman says he would love to do more *Dracula* Prestige Format stories: "I would like to do all four plots at once. I don't want any delay in the plotting, so that everything is completely consistent. I think I would come up with another really good character story. It's hard, because this was the redemption of the one character I wanted to deal with—all the others are gone. But even here, I've slowly introduced some interesting new characters to the mix. I wouldn't mind seeing Frank not continue, having other characters come in so that I'm not bound to books that were written 20 years ago.

"This series required that I complete the story, and it's a 'decade later' story. Now, if there are more books to write, I can go onto other things, and create new characters. Still, I hope we do any future project as a very solid four-parter, where we can sit down and plot a novel, rather than create a monthly continuity. That would make a phenomenal book, as far as I'm concerned!"

So, if Marv Wolfman and his *Tomb of Dracula* readers have their way, the residents of the Marvel Universe will be stocking up on garlic and crucifixes. Dracula will be rising from his tomb a great deal more often! CS

As if we had any doubts! The new *Dracula* isn't subject to the Comics Code's restrictions. Wolfman says they'll take *full* advantage of that!



Amblimation

Steven Spielberg & Universal Pictures launch London's newest animation studio.

By DAVID HUTCHISON

Occupying two floors of a nondescript building a few blocks from a decaying London Underground stop, the Universal/Amblin studio—or, as it is more commonly known, Amblimation—is fully staffed with about 250 artists working on three productions. Their first, *American Tail II: Fievel Goes West* is due out later this year. Other features in various stages of development include *We're Back*—based on illustrator Hudson Talbott's series of children's books featuring aliens and dinosaurs in the big city—and an animated version of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, *Cats*, scripted by playwright Tom Stoppard.

Spielberg's fascination with the animated film has been well known for years, and audiences were quick to spot the loving references in films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *1941*. His first forays into the medium were teamed with Don Bluth's studio, and after two successful features—*American Tail* and *The Land Before Time*—Spielberg is forging ahead with a full slate of new animation projects.

Uniquely organized by production manager Cynthia Woodbyrne, the new studio is laid out with all the major departments on a single open floor. At the room's center are animation directors Phil Nibblelink and Simon Wells. Radiating outwards from the hub, like spokes on a wheel, are the character animators and their assistants, effects animation, layout, background, camera, story and production departments. The story, music, checking and cel painting departments are located on the floor below.

Though Amblimation employs some of the team who worked on *Roger Rabbit*, the company has also recruited artists from all over Europe. In a way, it's an artistic league of nations. From desk to desk, you can hear Icelandic, Czech, Russian, Spanish, Italian, French, Finnish, German—and English, of course.

"We try to put the animators, their assistants and their in-betweeners close to each other," Woodbyrne explains. "We find that it helps communication not to put all the assistants together in one place and all the in-betweeners in another department. Many artists come here because of the opportunity to learn from each other, and this system fosters spontaneous conversation."

"I would say that 50 percent of our artists have never worked on a feature before," interjects associate producer Steve Hickner. "By the time we're finished, I think this team will have made one of the best-looking movies of the past 10 years." To accomplish this, Woodbyrne and Hickner admit that they have taken the organization that worked at Disney in the '30s and '40s and mixed that concept with systems that Woodbyrne liked during her years with Industrial Light & Magic. As a result, management at Amblimation is low-key, and the directors are pretty much given free reign.

"We keep a very lean management team," affirms Woodbyrne, "because artists don't appreciate much bureaucracy. Basically, it's myself, Steve Hickner and producer Robert Watts. You want the chain of command to be

as small as possible so that things can happen very quickly."

Banished are the long hallways and myriad private offices of other animation studios. Accessibility is the key word here. In some studios, if you have a problem or a question, you have to make an appointment to see the director...next week. Here, the directing duo of Wells and Nibblelink are instantly accessible and visible to all. There's no place to hide in an open studio, and the two directors have often found that being in the center of the wheel also places them in the eye of the storm.

"I think my frustration working as an animator has always been with directors who hid in their office, or who you couldn't find because they were always in cutting or at a meeting," states Nibblelink. "Here, all the department heads are within a 20-foot radius of this hub. As a result, I'm always trying to do three things at the same time: I help a writer with a gag, then I make a quick thumbnail sketch for someone else, and then I run off to look at a pencil test on video. Simon and I are trying to get the next film rolling, as well as trying to make sure that 250 artists are all working together to make the same movie. It's like the old vaudeville act. You know, the plate spinner? After he gets a dozen plates in the air, he has to run back to the first one to keep it from crashing, and so on. We have to keep our plates spinning throughout the entire production cycle of two years for each film; and that's from the beginning of development until the completed reels are handed in two years later."

Kristof Serrand animates the evil gentleman master-cat-crook Cat R.Waul voiced by John Cleese (see bulletin board).

Photo: David Hutchison

Photo: David Hutchison

The enticing Miss Kitty, animated by Nancy Beiman, is voiced by Amy Irving, who previously sang for Jessica Rabbit.

American Tail II starts in New York City of 1877, where it's very dark, dull and grey. "It's rainy, crime-ridden and dirty; so it's definitely a place the mice want to leave," explains Woodbyrne. "They take the train and travel through the varied cross-country terrain: Desert, mountains, prairie, streams, waterfalls, and they end up in this prairie town, so we have a complete change of color and light."

Shelley Page, who, Woodbyrne explains, did quite a lot of rendering on Jessica for *Roger Rabbit*, is painting backgrounds for *American Tail II*. She is engaged in the thankless job of executing several versions of the same setting under various lighting conditions at different times of day.

"I've painted this wretched town in every possible light from morn to midnight," laughs Page, gesturing at the series of backgrounds. "We only have a certain number of colors to work with so that changes of light and time depends very much upon the sky. Sunset, for example, has the Sun coming down; the next scene is much darker. The dawn painting when Fievel first arrives reverses the light and has cooler colors.

"The medium is watercolor under pastel, with a bit of airbrushed watercolor and ink on the skies," Page adds. "But mostly it's watercolor underneath and then a pastel layer on top. Our art director Neil Ross originated this technique. It gives depth to the colors and a slightly different texture, too. You can get a grainy, soft distant look, which is difficult to get in watercolor."

"We're going for a very romantic look," Ross affirms. "My feeling is that the standards for background painting in most features is low. It's not that there aren't good artists working in animation, but that they don't always seem to be doing their best work. We are trying for a strong sense of light and shade. Usually, animation backgrounds are bright and flat completely overlit. We are try-

An American Tail: Fievel Goes West picks up the Mousekewitz family about two years later. Moving from a poor mouse tenement in New York to the wide open spaces out West, Fievel searches for the tough lawman—or lawdog—Sheriff Wylie Burp.

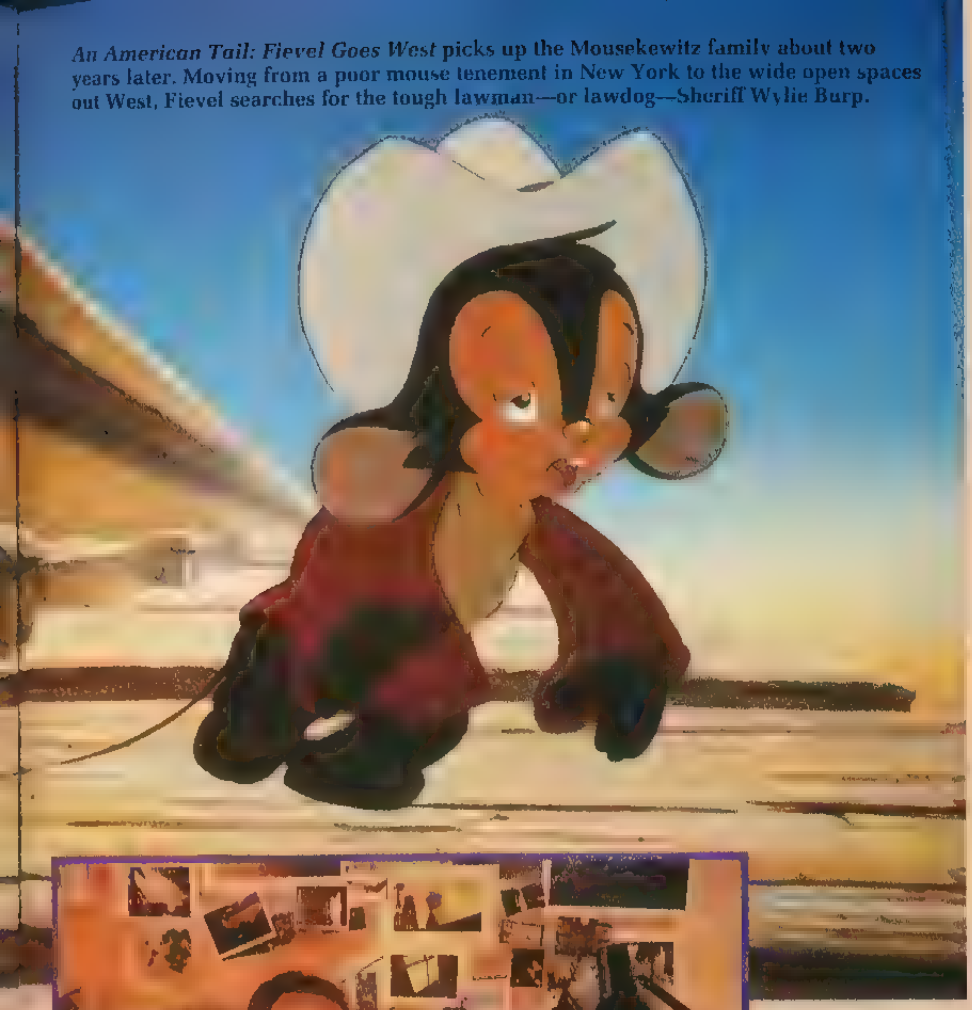
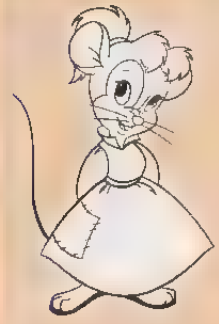
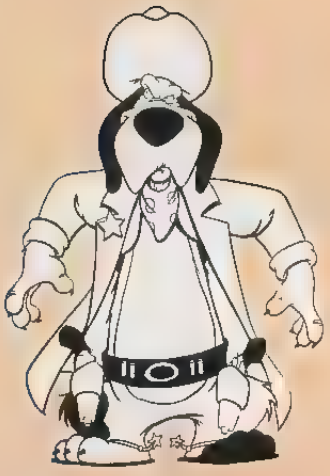


Photo: David Hutchison



Art Director Neil Ross is in charge of a team creating hundreds of Western backgrounds designed to exploit a classic sense of light and shadow.



ing to get the sense of characters really occupying a space with light and shade as you would in a live-action picture. I love to watch old films from the '30s and '40s for their lighting. I used to turn down the sound and just watch the shadows."

American Tail II is set in the Victorian era, so Ross has done a thorough photo research on the period, enabling him to add all the authentic-looking background froufrou that clutters Miss Kitty's boudoir. Not far away, Nancy Beiman—the picture's only female character-animator—is animating a scene with Miss Kitty and her reflection in a mirror.

"I'm using an illusion here that is actually quite simple, but it eliminates an awful lot of this artwork," Beiman begins. "The background artwork is actually going to have the center cut out. So, first I have the character standing in front of her mirror, then the cutout background goes under that, and then another level of animation goes under that. So, I can draw the entire character for the reflection; I'll have to animate both of these levels at the same time.

"When they shoot the scene, the camera department will add a little colored gel over the hole to tone down the reflected image a bit,"says Beiman. "This way Miss Kitty and her reflection can be painted exactly the same color and the gelatin in the mirror will effectively grey the colors down, and without any other effort from the painters or a separate pass in the camera. For me, it means that there won't be any registration line problems with the character in the mirror. That makes it easier for everybody. It does, however, mean that I have to animate two cats on different pieces of paper; I'm doing them at the same time because they have to correspond exactly.

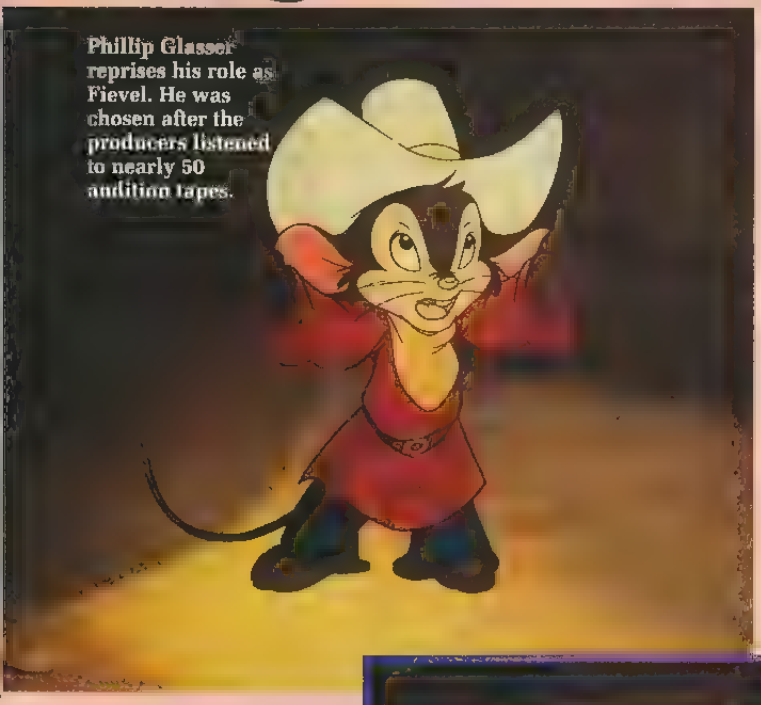
"So, here's the scene," Beiman pulls up a thick scene folder. "There will be two backgrounds and two Miss Kittys. Then, there is Cat R. Waul, who walks in. He's animated already [by supervising animator Kristof Serrand] and he's carrying a little mouse that my assistant will be doing. So, he walks in, the camera moves in, Kitty turns and speaks to him as he walks into the room carrying the mouse. He moves into a light source and the scene plays out. It's all very subtle. Miss Kitty is voiced by Amy Irving, and Cat R. Waul is John Cleese.

"Sometimes we use bits of the actor's facial expressions in a scene but most of the character and action we get from listening to the voice track," Beiman comments. "Cleese practically gives you the whole scene himself, because his voice-acting is so good that there's no way not to use the scene as he plays it. Cleese is particularly funny when he's trying to imitate a Western accent, which is hilariously awful. He tries to fool the mice into thinking he is a Western cat, so he says *Ya'll* a lot...except it's in this English accent.

"Miss Kitty, on the other hand, is a

All Tail Art· Trademark & Copyright 1990 Universal Cartoon Studios & Amblin Entertainment

Photo: David Hutchison



Phillip Glasser reprises his role as Fievel. He was chosen after the producers listened to nearly 50 audition tapes.

After studying audio-visual design at Leicester Polytechnic, director Simon Wells worked for famed British animator Richard Williams, directing animated commercials. After storyboarding *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, he became a supervising animator on that film. He subsequently did storyboarding and design work on *Back to the Future II & III*.

Photo: David Hutchison

Director Phil Nibblelink has been drawing cartoons from "the day he could hold a pencil." At 14, he began making Super-8 animated movies. He spent two years in the character animation program at Cal Arts tutored by Eric Larson. After working at Disney for several years, he became a supervising animator on *Roger Rabbit*.

more complicated character; she has a heavy Brooklyn accent and some of her dialogue is strange," says Beiman. "In this scene, she's walking along a back road. They come out from behind a building and she says: 'I don't want a tough cat, a top cat, or even a tough tabby. I just want.... How do I say this?' She takes a deep breath. 'I just want a cat, who's more like...' Now she's starting not to believe what she's going to say '...a *dog*.' She looks a little strange there because it is a rather bizarre thing to say.

"She's a very complicated character, I'm afraid she has a lot of detail. But she's much simpler in this other scene—she doesn't have the cap or the bonnet. She turns and walks toward the camera and through a light source. There is all this swirling back and forth. She walks with an exaggerated swing of the hips, too. She walks with a wiggle, as they say. And the tail exaggerates the hip action. When you see her from the back, you see the tail swinging in a figure eight. At the scene's end, she isn't paying too much attention to what she's doing. The tail comes right up and hits Tiger in the face." Dom DeLuise voices Tiger, a character reprised from the first film. Other character performances include Jon Lovitz as Chula the Tarantula and Jimmy Stewart as a dog, Sheriff Wylie Burp.

Over in effects animation, Scott Santoro is supervising a team of 25 artists, who animate anything that moves that isn't a character. This includes props, vehicles, tumbleweeds, shadows, mechanical gadgets, lighting effects and atmospheric effects. One sequence involves a cat chase in a rainstorm. There are puddles everywhere, so the animators must draw contact splashes for every paw splashing into every puddle. It's almost as tedious drawing all those tiny drops of water as it will be for the cel painters when the animators are finished. And even more tedious, later, for the checkers who must make sure that all the effects levels are matched with the proper character cels and that the exposure sheets are properly filled out. On Santoro's desk is a highly-detailed 37-foot scene of Fievel taking a wild ride through the sewers of New York in a tin can. It will occupy the artist for the next month. Santoro will animate the scene on two's and an assistant will complete the in-betweens.

Another effects artist is animating a shot that involves a combination dolly and zoom—a great camera effect that Alfred Hitchcock popularized in his film *Vertigo*. Here, however, the

(continued on page 66)

NINJA HIGH SCHOOL

Ben Dunn is in charge of teaching fun. Guess where.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Class is in session at the *Ninja High School*, and creator Ben Dunn is lecturing. "If I had to explain it as a high concept idea, it's 'alien princess and female ninja try to marry an American boy,' " Dunn smiles from behind his magical lectern.

"When you say that, I think most people conjure up images of their own. That's what I'm trying to do – conjure up images in the reader's own mind, because the readers have such active imaginations. That's why I always imply things, rather than fill them out. If I can get the readers' imaginations going, then they'll want to participate," he says.

Readers are now fiercely loyal to Itchy-Koo (the Japanese ninja) and Asrial (the alien princess from Salusia), as well as Jeremy and the rest of the cast at Quagmire High, but Dunn's road to success has taken a few detours.

Born in Taiwan and currently residing in Texas, Dunn was a devoted Marvel fan while growing up in the '70s, and began submitting art to them while still in high school. Although he received a rejection letter ("I still have it—it was a very nice rejection!"), he wasn't discouraged.

"When I got into college, I saw that there weren't really many Japanese-style comics. If you mentioned manga at a comics convention back in 1983, *nobody* would know what you were talking about! Since I had been exposed to manga in the early '70s, I decided to go ahead and use that technique in my own work," he says.

Around that time, Dunn and a partner started *Mangazine*. He says he was surprised by its success—the anthology book is still being published for manga-style artists. When Eternity Comics began publishing the *Robotech* books, they wanted to add other licensed properties to their line. Dunn suggested several Japanese titles (including *Dirty Pair*, which ended up at Eclipse), and began pencilling *Captain Harlock* when Eternity acquired that TV show property.

Following *Captain Harlock*, Dunn went on to create *Ninja High School*, his most successful comic to date. Its popularity also took him by surprise.

"I never would have expected it,"

"It doesn't matter if [*NHS*] reaches a national audience," Dunn admits.

he says. "I was going to do a series of manga-inspired books, and *Ninja High School* just happened to be one of the things that grew from its three-issue mini-series. But I was encouraged by the response, and I thought, 'If I could do this every month, I'll be OK—I'll make a comfortable living!' So, I started doing it as a series."

One of the inspirations for *Ninja High School* is what Dunn calls the "Japanese comedies."

"Basically, they've got cute girls, cute guys, lots of violence and a really ridiculous storyline," he says. "But, I also liked Archie comics, and nobody was really doing humor books except Archie. So, I thought I would raise the stakes a little. I decided to do a humor book, but draw all the backgrounds realistically, to create a real-world setting. I threw all this manga-inspired stuff in there.

"*Ninja High School* is a forum where I can put in stuff that I like. If I like a particular comic, I'll plug the hell out of it in *Ninja High School*. I've been putting a lot of *Flaming Carrot* stuff in there lately.

"The good thing about it is that when you create this cast of goofy characters, you can do anything you want with them! The one thing I didn't want to do with *Ninja High School* is bog it down, like *Archie*. *Archie* is stuck in a rut, but they don't want to break that formula. With *Ninja High School*, you can't anticipate what the next issue's going to be about, because I don't let the audience second-guess me. However, some of our readers *have* started to catch on!" he laughs.

Readers play an important role, says Dunn, and he has used their suggestions for story ideas. "The readers don't realize how important their letters really are to the creative process," he says, noting that some readers have suggested storylines and characters still being used.

"The King Rat storyline was suggested by David McCullan, which I actually used in *Ninja High School* #14 and #15. I usually put in little things here and there that readers suggest, and some of them have been able to foretell what I'm going to do in an issue!" he laughs. "Each story leads to another story, and it perpetuates. It's important to keep it fresh. If we introduce a new character that the readers like, they'll want to see more.

"I'm glad that it's doing well, but to me, it *doesn't* matter if it reaches a national audience. I would like it to, but my readers are loyal, they enjoy the series, and they're not afraid to let me know if they don't like something! I like that kind of honesty."

Now into its third year, *Ninja High School* was originally published by Dunn's own Antarctic Press before moving to Eternity Comics after the fourth issue.

Dunn signed with Eternity for 36 issues of *Ninja High School*, and says he'll probably renew the contract because he enjoys working with his Eternity editor and the company.

"I believe in loyalty," he says. "Money is not that important to me. Loyalty is something you earn, and

***Ninja High School* offers "cute girls, cute guys, lots of violence and a ridiculous storyline," says creator Ben Dunn.**

All Ninja High School Art Ben Dunn

when you've lost it, it's gone. I think it's more important than money. I can't really fault Marvel and DC for flooding the market, but I consider it *unnecessary*—it's like they're not playing fair. They're simply not giving us a chance. But, they're corporations and they want to make money. If I was in the same boat, I would probably do the same thing, but it doesn't seem fair."

Despite Dunn's outside activities, Antarctic Press still thrives, publishing such projects as *Mangazine* and *Albedo*. He explains that, since Eternity turned down the *Ninja High School Yearbook* with its fan artwork, Antarctic will handle the project.

The future will see new *NHS* characters popping up, including Akaru Kaiju, who's introduced in issue #30 and #31. "He's an extremely chauvinistic South Seas islander who received a message in a bottle from Itchy-Koo when she was young, and had vowed to be her friend," he explains. "He scours the Earth to be with her, but is very chauvinistic in the process. He's amazed at how strong the females are in Quagmire, and decides that the males there are too soft and need to be toughened up!"

All Ninja High School Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1991 Ben Dunn

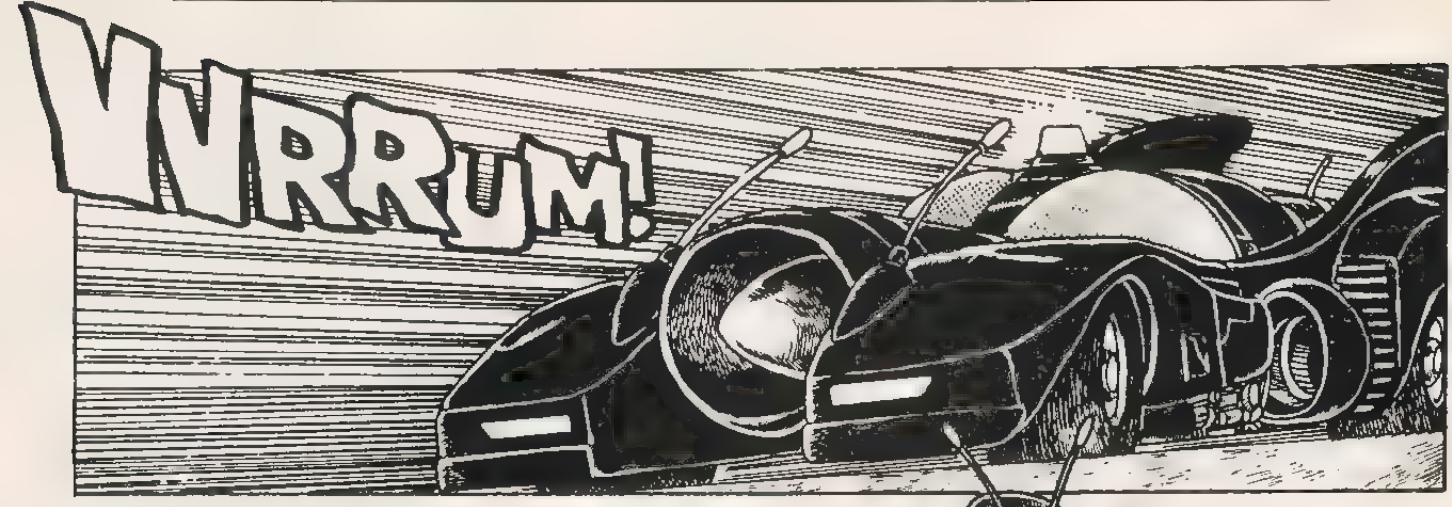
South Seas islander Akaru Kaiju (left) plans to toughen up Quagmire's male students, including Jeremy.

Issue #32 begins the Ninja High School vs. the Giant Monster storyline, according to Dunn. "That will tie up the Salusian-Zardon war situation, and will end the entire war," he says, and reveals that the story following involves Magical Mimi's origin.

Besides the monthly title, *NHS* fans will have several related spin offs to enjoy. "I'm going to be drawing *Ninja University*, and that will be a three-issue *What If* -type of story," he explains. "Actually, it's more of an alternate *Ninja High School* than a *What If*. It'll be a more serious, adult-oriented title—that is, it'll cover mature storylines, but not necessarily involve sexual situations.

The writer/artist will end the Salusian-Zardon war with a Ninja High School-vs.-the Giant Monster storyline.

All Ninja High School Art: Courtesy Ben Dunn/Eternity Comics



"*Ninja High School* is a forum where I can put stuff in that I like," reveals Dunn.

"*Asrial* will be a three-issue miniseries in which we introduce Asrial's half-brother, Kalen the Pirate. There's also *Zetraman*, with Steve Ross and Greg Espinoza. We also plan on doing *Hitomi's Girl Commandos*, a combination of Japanese mysticism and Scooby-Doo! It'll be written and drawn by David Wilson."

The future of *Ninja High School* may extend to various licensed products; under discussion are items ranging from video games to a line of clothing. An animated series was pitched to Hanna-Barbera. "I had to do a bunch of conceptual designs for licensing—I had to change everything! The process of licensing is incredibly complex," he says. "They wanted more Americans, so that's the first thing I had to change. Then, the women had to be less endowed, younger and more proportioned to what a real female of that age would be like. The characters also had to look more distinctive—many of my girls follow the same pattern.

"But, it's all up in the air. And despite any of that, I'll still do the comic book. I'll *never* quit."

Dunn remains fiercely loyal to his characters and his readers -even though he says he can't really account for his success. Why does he think *Ninja High School* is so popular?

"I don't know!" admits Ben Dunn. "I know *I* like it. It's a fun book for me to do, because I enjoy the characters and I like sharing my ideas with readers. Maybe my ideas aren't popular enough to reach a mass audience, but I enjoy it. Maybe the readers just like the fact that the characters change. I do what I enjoy, and if the readers enjoy it, then it makes me feel good. My work may *be* work, but I'm having a great time. I wouldn't trade my job for *anything* in the world!" Class dismissed. CS

Dunn likes working on *Ninja High School*. "I enjoy the characters and sharing my ideas with readers."

By Any Other NAME

Whilce Portacio heads a team of X-Men new & old.

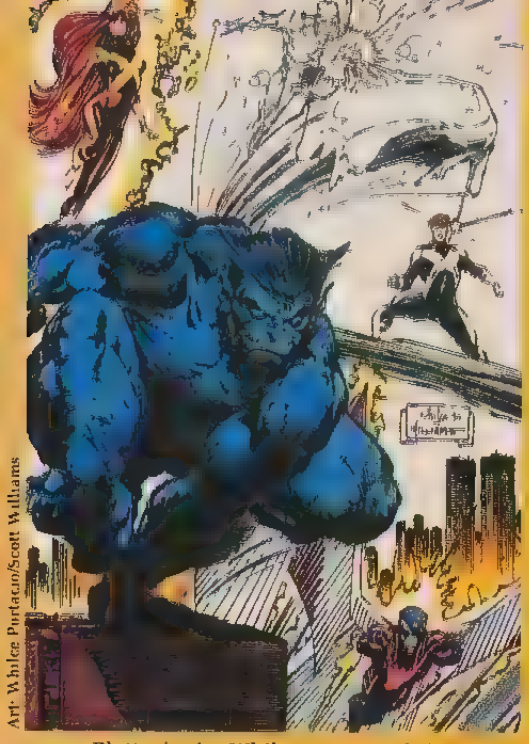
By HANK KANALZ

The artist is having an identity crisis! "That person you see at conventions is *not* really me!" he exclaims. "My name *isn't* really Whilce Portacio. I'm not Japanese, I just sign my covers that way!"

But as far as everyone's concerned, this *is* Whilce Portacio, the artist who's ending his run on Marvel's *X-Factor* to pick up plotting and pencilling chores on the recently vacated *Uncanny X-Men*. This *is* the artist who has steadily gained a following because of his work on *The Punisher*, *Alien Legion* and most recently, *X-Factor* and *Legion of Night*. He can *call* himself whatever he likes!

"I originally wanted to draw comics under just the name 'Whilce.' It's a nickname I got in high school. I thought it would be a good name to use, as it's somewhat untraceable," says the artist. A good reason, as Portacio's style is one of the few "untraceable" styles in comics today. Portacio comments, "I made a conscious effort for four years, while studying art, *not* to look at any comics. I had a great art teacher in high school who said that style is imperfection. If you copy someone's style, you copy their imperfections and magnify them to the point that it just looks *wrong*. I try not to be influenced, except for what I have in my head. I don't know if I've found my style, *per se*. I'm still searching for it."

He started his search in grade school, when his teacher gave him a pencil and paper. After going through the room and saying, "Nice drawing! What is it?" she recognized Portacio's illustration of Saturn 5 lifting off and asked, "Did you watch the Apollo rockets?" After that—while living on the island of Midway, site of a famous World War II battle—Portacio graduated to drawing planes and sinking carriers. His neighbor gave him a stack of old comic books, and Portacio was hooked. Portacio cites two of his all-time favorite comic artists—Jack Kirby and Neal Adams. His two favorite characters are Silver Surfer and Deathlok. "You can tell I go for the extremes. I learn better that way. I can learn from any artist, even ones I don't particularly like. I can look at an illustration and see what I would do differently, and hopefully better."



Art: Whilce Portacio/Scott Williams

Plotter/artist Whilce Portacio left *X-Factor*, but brought most of the team with him into *The Uncanny X-Men*.

Portacio was turned on to Adams' *X-Men* when he attended high school in Hawaii, where he met longtime friend and mutant inker Scott Williams. After getting straight A's all through high school, Portacio and his family moved to the Philippines. "My parents really pushed me to become a doctor, lawyer or engineer. For the first time in my life, I decided to be pigheaded and pursue a career in art. I liked the idea of creating something out of nothing." So, Portacio went to a fine arts school and quickly flunked out. "My parents thought something was wrong with me, so they sent me back here [California]." Four months later, he landed his first job.

Although *X-Factor* was Portacio's big break into what he considers mainstream comics, his first major job was inking Art Adams' work on Marvel's *Longshot*. "I intended on breaking in as a penciller," says Portacio, "but nobody told me you had to tell a story. [Editor] Carl Potts said I should try inking in the meantime, and he assigned me to *Longshot*. While I was doing that, I was learning storytelling. Carl would send me cinematography books, and with his help, I learned how to tell a story." Known for his work on *Alpha Flight* and *Alien Legion*, Portacio quickly became a favorite for his stint on *The Punisher* with writer Mike Baron. "*The Punisher* bought me time. After working on that book, I was able to relax a little since the royalties took care of my financial needs."

The extra time enabled Portacio to take on *Legion of Night*. Initially not committing to the project, Portacio asked to read the plot. "I read it and I just saw the story in my head. I felt challenged, and if I'm challenged, I'll always pick up the gauntlet. I wanted to make my mark. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I didn't hit all the marks I aimed for. One of the biggest challenges for me was a flashback within a flashback, with jumps back into present reality—a real mess, but also a real challenge for me to pull off successfully. I look at *Legion of Night* as a starting point for me. It's a ground-breaker for me in that format. It enables me to have an unlimited palette of colors, and the bleeding off all sides gives me a better page to lay out. And the printing process enables Scott and me to show just how fine-lined we can get!"

Portacio works out of Homage Studios in San Diego with fellow X-artists Jim Lee (CS #21) and Scott Williams. "It's a very productive environment. There's what I consider a friendly competition between me and Jim." Portacio recalls an incident at a convention several years ago when both he and Lee were on the *Punisher* books. The two artists were on a panel. At its end, they were signing books, and Lee started signing his name with a little Punisher head next to his signature. Portacio began drawing slightly bigger heads, so Lee started drawing tiny figures. Portacio took the backing board out from a collector's bag and drew a head on the board. Lee responded by drawing figures on his boards.

"In about two hours, we had a huge line out the door, and Jim and I were doing full sketches! The competition is healthy in the studio, because when Jim draws a particularly good page or panel, it inspires me to do better on whatever

Portacio's main reason for doing *Uncanny X-Men* is that "except for Scott, I'm getting most of the old team."

Art: Whilce Portacio/Art Thibert

Shinobi Shaw "convinces" his father that he should lead a new Hellfire Club.

..YEAH, CAN DO ALL KINDS OF THINGS WITH T...
..PEEK INTO THE GIRL'S SHOWER ROOM ..TAKE A CROWBAR TO THE CHIN...
..INDUCE MASSIVE CORONARY SEIZURES...
AAAGH!
NNRGGH!!

Art: White Portacio/Art Thibert/Colors: Oliver & Thomas

The artist sees his work on the *Legion of Night* mini-series as "a groundbreaker for me."

I'm working on. Practically speaking, it's not as lonely, plus we can help each other out when needed."

Several times all three artists have collaborated both anonymously and under the Homage name. Portacio explains the teamwork: "Jim, to me, is the ultimate comic artist. He knows how to thrill the fans in terms of figures, and I would like to learn more of that from him. What I add to that is a solid understanding of light logic and rendering. When you're dealing with fantastic people in incredible situations, I feel it's more believable yet more fantastic when you execute the art in a realistic way. Scott's forté is inking figures and faces. He has a very fluent and lively line. Jim can lay out characters with very dynamic stances, which takes me a bit of time to do. So, when we do a Homage Studios project, Jim and I get together and lay out the story. Jim will put in the figures, and I'll come in and render everything. Scott comes in and inks everything. He can ink figures in his sleep, even if it's from what we consider scribbles.

"When I read comics, I always liked the idea of a Bullpen," adds Portacio. "The idea of having Jack Kirby look over my shoulder and say, 'That's good, but why don't you try it this way?' excited me! When I broke in and found out that there wasn't such a thing, I was disillusioned. So, Homage Studios is good in that sense, too."

After noting that his strengths are in his rendering, Portacio is quick to mention that, at times, he sees the weaknesses in his figures. "I have no problem drawing Japanese women!"

he says, gleaming. "But sometimes, I have trouble with Caucasian males. I draw from life, and when I look in the mirror, I don't see a heroic American face. I also like to draw normal people, instead of heroic figures. I'm still learning—anytime an artist claims he's bored or can't go any further, then he's dead as an artist."

Portacio takes over plotting and pencilling *The Uncanny X Men* with issue #281. Portacio is cleaning house in his first story with the help of Jim Lee. "My responsibilities include getting rid of Pierce, the White Queen, and to disrupt the Hellions. I also need to bring in the Sentinels and introduce the Upstarts storyline that will involve *The X-Men*." Although reluctant to reveal too much, Portacio does share some future plans. "Sebastian Shaw's son is starting up a new Hellfire Club. The initiation for this Club is to kill a member of the old Hellfire Club. The new members are known as the Upstarts." One of the Upstarts' powers is to bring things from the past and future into our time. The Sentinels are the ones from the future, brought here by the Upstarts.

For quality and time's sake, Portacio enlisted Lee's aid for the first issue. "I felt that if I were to come on the book and get rid of everyone, I shouldn't read a stack of *Uncanny X-Men*. I ran the risk of liking some of the characters, and then I wouldn't be able to get rid of them! So, I asked Jim, since he had been on the book and knew the characters well. We sat down and figured out the basic storyline. Jim likes to write really open plots, so we had a lot of flexibility."

After laying the foundation for future storylines, including a cross-over with *X-Men* in the tenth issue, Portacio plans on exploring writer John Byrne's story idea about the Alpha Sentinel. "Byrne and I come from the same direction and take on these characters. We seem to get along well, and I wouldn't mind working right away, co-plotting with Byrne. He has many good ideas."

The rumors that Portacio was offered *The Uncanny X-Men* before Lee took over are true. Portacio turned it down because he wasn't familiar with the characters. "When Jim called me and mentioned that *X-Factor* was available, I took that because it essentially had all the original X-Men in it. The only reason I'm doing *Uncanny* now is that, except for Scott, I'm getting most of the old team."

Since Portacio is a fan of the original X-Men, and Byrne is known for his back-to-basics approach to comics, expect some major alterations of *Uncanny X-Men*. Portacio

Despite working on *Uncanny X-Men*, Portacio prefers drawing "normal people, instead of heroic figures."

AND MY KINGSHIP IS ASSURED!"
THESE SENTINELS SEEM DIFFERENT FROM ANY WE HAVE BATTLED IN THE PAST
BUT NOT SO DIFFERENT THEY CAN RESIST THE POWER OF M ARMORED FORM!
I'M FREE!
THAT'S ONE I OWE YOU X-MAN!

plans on taking the book back to the school to capture Xavier's original vision of what the X-Men are all about. "In the original X-Men concept, there were only a handful of mutants. Now, there are entire countries. Depending on where you are, you're a member of the minority or majority." There are plans for at least one new team member to join very soon. Portacio says he's a study in contrast: "He's brought into the team against his and the team's wishes by Xavier. By forcing him on the team, everyone will be on edge. They'll wonder why he doesn't want to join this nifty group. Charles has his own reasons as to why he's forcing him on the team.

"The new character has the potential to be 10 times as bad as Magneto ever was, or he can take Scott's place as team leader. Xavier is the one who keeps this character in check—keeps

(continued on page 66)

Pierce and the White Queen may be gone, but don't think that there won't be enough bad guys in *Uncanny X-Men*.

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Tintin

(continued from page 40)

only other studio producing the same quality as Nelvana on a regular basis is Disney. HBO, which broadcasts *Babar*, was interested in having another show with the same classic qualities. Our *Tintin* proposal satisfied their needs. It's not going to be part of the Saturday morning block. HBO will play it at different times, just as they do *Babar*. The same thing's true for the Canadian Family Channel. And it'll go to videocassette."

While co-producing *Tintin* across two oceans and three continents has created its share of difficulties, Hirsch downplays any suggestion of collaborative difficulties with the French creative team. "The French grew up with the character," he explains. "For us, it was more of an educational process. We've worked with them now for a good three or four years, so we have good communication. Between the French studio and ours, there are about 200 animators working on *Tintin*, so we spend a lot of time visiting each others' studios to make sure that everybody understands what's going on. Also, at any given time, we have one person working in France. Ray Jaffelice, a first season director on *Ewoks*, has been the project's supervisor in France. We [and Ellipse] are also partners in a studio in France, Le Studio, that's working on *Tintin*. The French are doing the layouts and the key animation. The in-betweening, painting and shooting are being done in Korea."

Hirsch indicates that about nine months are spent producing each episode, budgeted at approximately $400,000 each. "A Saturday morning show takes about six months. This is a higher-budget, higher-quality show. Also, when you do things in Canada and France, things take more time."

Now, having worked on the project for seven months, Fordham's feelings towards it have changed. "It's scary working on a show like this," she reveals, "but it's exciting. I like it. Working on *Babar* was a lot more scary, coming onto an established series after 55 or 56 good episodes had already been done. Here, I came in at the beginning. I get to put my thumbprints on it."

Dennise Fordham feels the best way to please her audience is to please herself. "If I was a kid, this is what I would want to watch. I always preferred human-oriented cartoons over those with animals when I was growing up. Especially ones about somebody like Tintin, who's not an adult but can do adult things. Other kids will like him, too." CS

Taz-Mania

(continued from page 12)

designed and refined the models for the *Taz-Mania* cast.

The music composer is Richard Stalling, who worked with composer Bruce Broughton on *Tiny Toon Adventures*. As in *Tiny Toons*, each episode will be individually scored, albeit with a smaller orchestra.

"We're going for a different style and flavor," Vitello explains. "As opposed to a full orchestra, we're going to have more of a small band feel to the music. Sound effects-wise, there'll be a similarity. The sound might be a little different; sparse in some cases, a little more impressionistic in others.

"I'm going more for a graphic design approach with the look. This way, the characters' line style will integrate better with the backgrounds. Then, you can have fun with the backgrounds.

"Like the old gags where somebody goes to a tip of a cliff and then they fall; you know the cliff tip is going to fall already because it looks like a piece of cel animation there, and everything else is painted. Hopefully, with this style, things like that won't be telegraphed the same way. So, you might not expect the background to suddenly move."

According to Vitello, the budget for *Taz-Mania* is roughly the same as *Tiny Toon Adventures*. Animation is being done by many of the same firms that worked on *Tiny Toons*: Akom, Wang and a Chicago sub-contractor, Star Toons.

The show's half-hour format (including commercials) features either two 10 minute segments or one 20-minute story (about every fifth episode). The first 13 episodes air this year on the Fox Network Saturday mornings. The current plans for another 13 episodes next season, after which *Taz-Mania* will move to Fox's weekday afternoon schedule. Warners is already committed to producing the *full* 65-episode package.

"In Warner cartoons," Vitello observes, "the character really doesn't learn something through a story. Yosemite Sam never learned. Daffy Duck never learned. On these shows, there hasn't been any kind of overly-moralizing stance. Nobody has really pushed it that way. They want *Taz-Mania* to be a *comedy* show."

So, at the episode's end, one of Vitello's characters might ask Taz, "What have we learned by this story?"

Taz replies, "!R!#$*!%!#*H!"

"Yeah, you're right. We haven't learned a thing."

Such is life in *Taz-Mania*. CS

McKimson

(continued from page 19)

me," Freleng recalls. "Bob had just come from the doctor and they told him he had a long life coming because of his past history [McKimson's father lived past 100]. And he was bragging: 'I'm gonna be around after you guys are gone!' And it just happened."

Freleng sums up McKimson's directorial career as follows: "There was nothing sensational during the time he was directing and nothing bad. He rode an even keel." While what constitutes *sensational* is in the eye of the beholder, this argument does pinpoint another reason for Robert McKimson's "third man" standing at Warners: His cartoons maintained a level of consistency that makes it difficult to isolate any one as his signature masterpiece. There seems to be no "What's Opera, Doc?" or "Porky in Wackyland" in the McKimson *oeuvre*.

Neither was McKimson ever able to shake the tag of "junior" director. He took "leftover" animators and even received less salary than Freleng and Jones. And characteristically: "This didn't bother me, really," he told Mike Barrier of his perceived *third wheel* status, "it bothered other people more than it bothered me."

What then is the legacy of Robert McKimson? The bottom line is that he produced a body of solid work that continues to reach and entertain new audiences to this day. While he was not out to stretch the limits of the medium, McKimson was a key contributor to what has been called the greatest short-subject studio in history. His characters endure through television, particularly his two favorites, Foghorn Leghorn and the Tasmanian Devil. Efforts begun recently by his children will try to raise McKimson-consciousness through limited edition cels based on his original drawings.

Ironically, television—the medium he so effectively poked fun at—has probably done more than anything to enhance McKimson's reputation. Says Friz Freleng: "I see that all of our cartoons, whether they were better ones or less, seem to get strong reactions on TV because there is no audience. When we were running them in the theaters, we went by the number of laughs you would get, and Robert's didn't do as well in the theaters as they do on TV, because TV has a one-man audience. I think he would be very happy to know that his cartoons are more acceptable on TV than they were in theaters."

That, then, may be his ultimate legacy: After so many years, Robert McKimson still provides the laughs. CS

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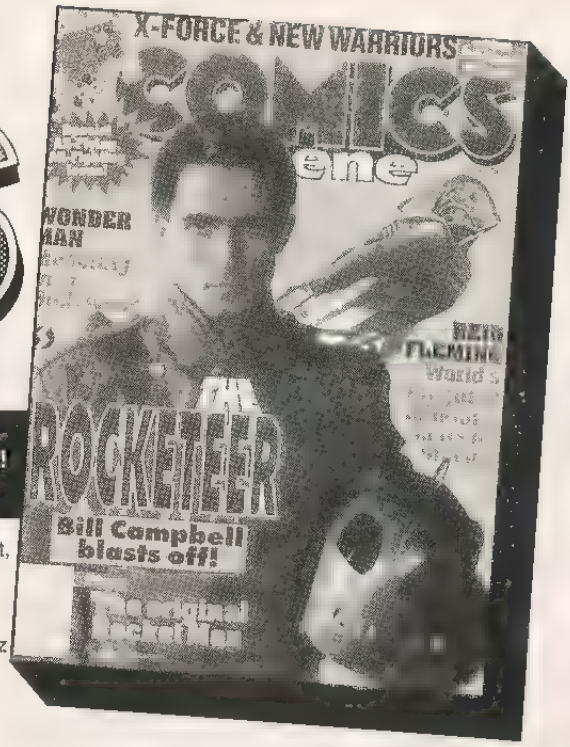

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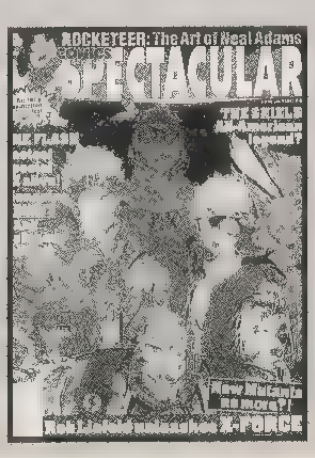

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Duck

(continued from page 37)

before Daffy. The guys at Disney and Warners constantly studied the classic comedians. All I can say is, I took every precaution to keep Darkwing separate from Daffy. If the comparisons are there, I can't help that."

Darkwing overcomes adversity despite his stumblebum tendencies. As Zaslove outlines it, "At times, he's absolutely slick and efficient. Other times, he really screws up. His web kick and karate chop work fine until he comes up against a gorilla."

Since he has no X-ray vision or 007-caliber devices at his disposal—only a Thunderquack jet and turbo-charged Ratcatcher motorcycle—Darkwing must rely largely on his mental powers to overcome his adversaries. Thus, he "almost always appears in a blue puff of smoke," Stones recounts. "He then says his catch phrase, 'I am the the terror that flaps in the night. I am the...' the rest is always a gag: 'I am the combination lock on the vault of justice,' or, 'I am the rust that corrodes the underside of your car.' Sometimes his entrance goes wrong, sometimes it goes right. His whole approach is, 'I'm gonna freak these guys out.'

"He also uses his gas gun, which shoots every type of gas imaginable, as well as sneezing powder and itching powder. Usually, the wrong thing comes out. Aside from that, he has his web kick, so he's always using a karate thing. But generally, he uses brain power to outwit the criminal or set him up for the fall."

After 16 years in business—he began his career as an in-betweener on *The Rescuers*—it's Tad Stones' love for animation that fuels his enthusiasm for his work. "To me, animation combines everything I've been interested in, just about, in my life. Animation is storytelling, so I enjoy that. It's artwork, both from storyboarding to the actual animation. It's creating a universe you can lose yourself in, doing things you can't do in any other medium.

"It's a cliché to say 'do what you enjoy,' but I really *do* enjoy what I do. It's not work for me; I get to draw, I get to write, I get to work with the most talented people in the industry.

"The one line that comes up over and over again in doing this show, every time a new person comes on—sound editors, dubbing directors, voice people—is, 'Oh boy, we're doing a cartoon.' That really makes me feel good because that's exactly what Alan and I set out to do." CS

Keane

(continued from page 28)

took the footage his wife shot of him flapping his arms, laid stills from the videotape on paper, put a fresh sheet of paper over them, "and started transposing myself into an eagle, turning my arms into wings. So I really felt like what it was like to take off. It was a feeling of *power*, incredible strength that you feel in your body. In my mind, I'm thinking, *just imagine, out from your shoulder, it goes 80 feet out, this is all wing, pushing down the air*, and it's just awesome strength."

When he wasn't flapping his arms on armchairs, Keane was visiting Edwards Air Force Base to watch jets land. "You feel fear, the power of these things could just eliminate you in an instant. And yet you also feel respect, because these are American jets, and this is the defense of your country. And that's how we have to feel about the eagle."

They tried Marahute with a high, grandmotherly voice, "but it was just like letting the air out of a tire; the eagle lost all of her impact." The absence of speech made her all the more challenging to draw. "we had to come up with real eagle movements to communicate a thought. When the boy asks her whether her eggs are going to hatch soon, she doesn't say, *Yes they are*! I tried to do a head movement, a nod, but something wasn't right about her trying to communicate in human terms. So, I'll just have her do a very eagle thing of letting the feathers rise up, and have the audience interpret what she's saying there. So we did, and animated all those feathers, which is an incredibly time-consuming thing for the staff of artists underneath me."

With thousands of drawings, including hundreds of feathers, each drawing could take up to three hours. "In order to keep track of them, we put different names on different feathers. We had the Jeffrey Katzenberg feather, the Michael Eisner feather. We were exhausted by the end, as if we had just run a marathon."

Even the way the eagle walks was a big deal. "They kinda do this," says Keane, and demonstrates a careful, pigeon-toed walk, "as if they're afraid they're gonna break something. It's because their hips are fused to their torso, so their chest and hips are all one unit. That's why they waddle when they walk. Eagles look ungainly on the ground."

The only animated bird Keane could recall was from the very first piece of animation he ever saw, "Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor," a Fleischer cartoon short made in 1936. "There was this big, huge bird the size of Marahute that steals Olive Oyl and goes flying off. I knew I wasn't going to fly Marahute with rubber-hose animation like that."

So, in addition to his other research, Keane read books on aerodynamics, physics and anatomy. Any time he had a chicken dinner, he would study the pieces on his plate to see how they were put together. And you thought animation was just about drawing pictures!

Animators are actually "cast" in movies, just as actors are, since each one has particular strengths and abilities. Keane is an upper-body kind of animator. "I usually do the villains," says Keane, "something that's big and powerful and massive. Originally in *The Little Mermaid*, I was supposed to do Ursula," the evil squid woman, "but I really wanted a change, so they gave me Ariel."

Keane isn't sure why *Rescuers Down Under* took a dive at the box office. He supposes that maybe it didn't have "that timeless element" because it wasn't based on a fairy tale. "I think it will find its own market in another generation. Even my wife, although she loved all the eagle stuff, wasn't captivated by the story."

His father didn't get a chance to see it in the theater either, although he usually sees everything Glen works on. "My family life was always a very nurturing thing," says Keane. "Dad wouldn't make you feel like you were being exploited for the comic. I even thought my dad drew the better half of what went on at home. I didn't even think my dad was that special until one day a kid came up to me at school in second grade and said, 'You think you're so special because your dad draws *The Family Circus*. Well, my dad draws *Big George*.' Now when I look back at it, I see that Dad was constantly watching us, observing everything we did. I look at my own family that way, and I don't let family things slide just because I'm working on a picture."

With *Beauty & the Beast* finishing up, Keane plans to take some time off from animation before answering its siren call once again. You might never think to look at mild-mannered Glen Keane that he's the first person Disney calls on when they need raw power, massive reserves of physical and emotional strength. He is truly a beast among animators. CS

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A superhero comes of age as he finds a new home at DC Comics.

Art Matt Wagner

By T.L. JOHNS

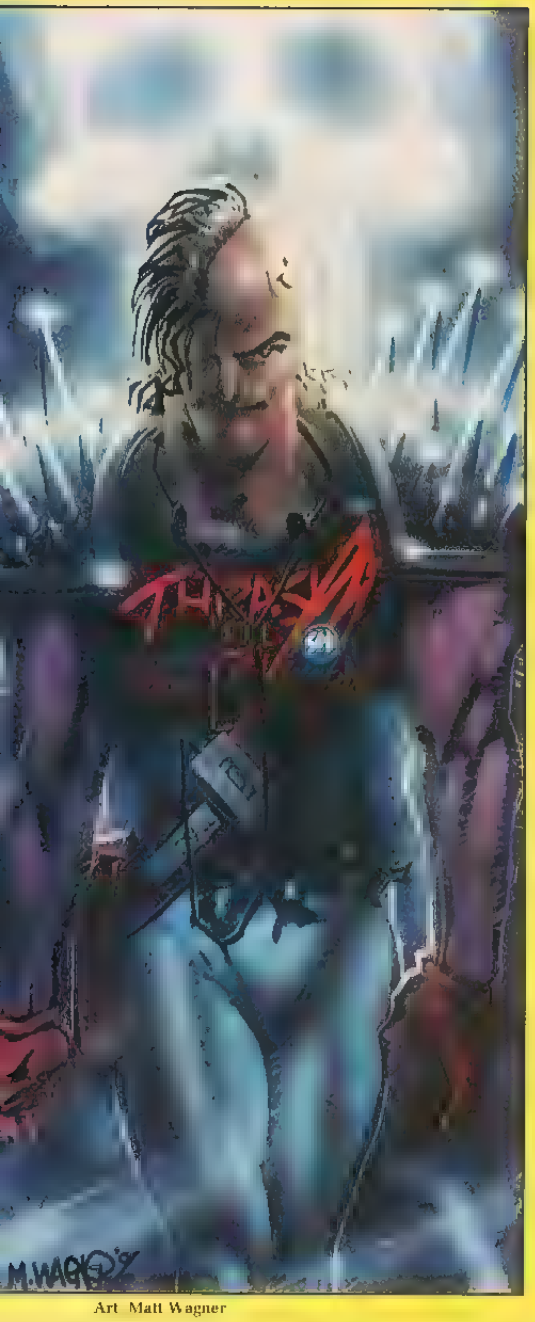
A TALE

Imagine this: For the last 20 years you've been employed by aliens from another solar system as a "superhero" mercenary. You have a new body, but the same juvenile mind and attitudes. You get homesick for Earth and go AWOL, causing changes, not only to the lives of those who thought you were dead, but to your home planet. What's a fellow to do?

These and other questions are answered by co-creators Dan Vado and Norman Felchle in their new DC Prestige Format mini-series, *The Griffin*. Heralded as a "superhero coming of age" story, Vado addresses Matt Williams (a.k.a. The Griffin) this way: "You could say he is Superman and Captain America melded into one. He's really strong, and he has been displaced and out of time for 20 years. Now, he's returning to a world that has changed considerably. Beyond that, *The Griffin* gets difficult to describe. It has elements of science fiction, of every superhero book anyone has ever read and of my own genuine observations.

"When I came up with the concept five years ago," Vado adds, "what I was trying to do was create a universe of co-existing characters and form an alliance of comics as part of the Slave Labor Graphics line [which Vado publishes] that would keep up with our competition. So, I came up with this title, a melding of my two favorite characters. I approached several artists, but they all had their own ideas. I assigned it to another creative team, but again no one came through with what I wanted. Then, I hooked up with Norman Felchle. He had the right attitude. I liked the way he drew the character and the aliens. He approached things with a sense of humor that wasn't so 'out there' that it was juvenile funny, but rather subtle funny. I knew we were going to work well together.

"It took almost a year before I got to work with Norman, and then an-



Art: Matt Wagner

Assigned with the task of returning Matt Williams to the Acacians is Carson, whom Vado calls a "fun" character.

other year to get the book off the ground. After that, we only had three issues published," Vado says.

The Griffin's origins at Slave Labor are still a sore spot with Vado because of the lessons he has had to learn: "People who were working for us were leaving, some who were going to do projects for us backed out and went off to do those same projects with larger publishers. I decided to stop holding myself to a different set of morals than other people. Here I was with a project that might be worth something, so I thought, 'Let's see what would happen.' I had a friend at DC, and I went to them and said, 'Here's the script, do *you* want it?' They said they would show it around. In about a week, they got back to me and said yes. It took about a year after that to get a contract put together.

"Someone even joked with me once – which is what put the thought in my head – that they thought *The Griffin* was *almost* good enough to be a DC book. At the time I thought, 'Oh, how big of you!' But when we couldn't do [the book] anymore, I thought about it. I thought, this could be a way for me to make a living. Luckily, I'm a better writer than a publisher," laughs Vado.

"I published comics because I wanted to get my own books published. And I wanted to write the books I wanted to read. It was never a bed of roses. We never made any money doing it. After a while, I lost track of *why* I was doing it. If doing a book myself for DC means I can publish better independent comics, then it's worth it. And I'm having more fun working for DC than I am publishing my own stuff. One of the shocking realizations was that I couldn't publish a book that I wrote because I couldn't afford to pay people a decent wage to draw it. Now that I'm doing work for DC, Slave Labor is becoming what I wanted it to be all along, this small group of people just doing the books that they want to do."

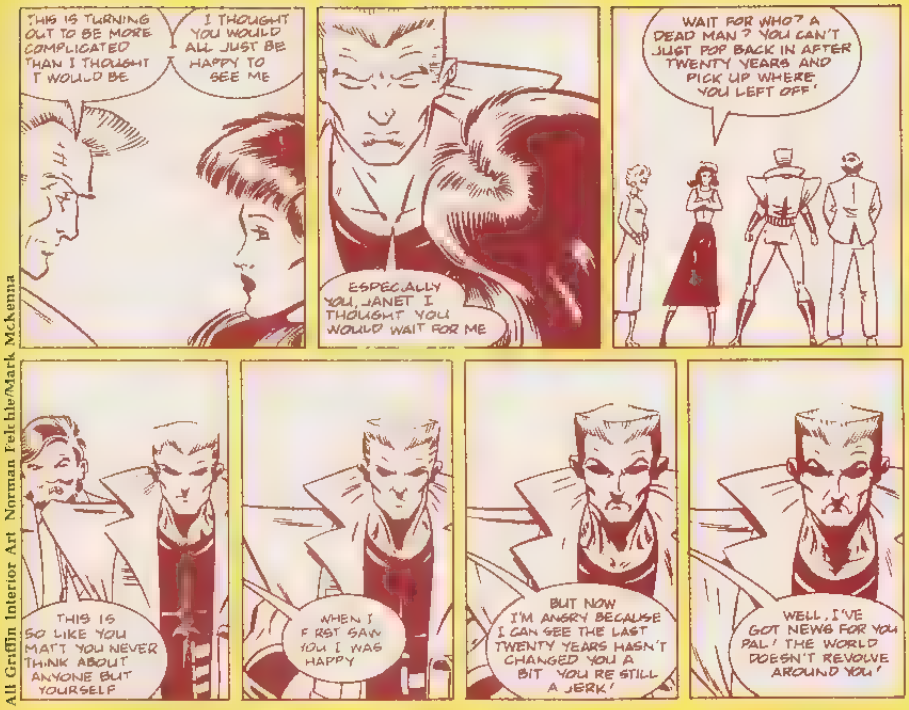
Although *The Griffin* is somewhat of an experiment for DC, Vado seems assured that more indies will be making the jump to mainstream in the near future. "They did it with *Ms Tree*. We're only the second, but I think it's something you're going to see more of. The companies want to expand in a way that won't tax their abilities to put out the books they're already producing. So, when DC picked up our book, they picked up a creative team as well. All they had to do was come up with an inker. Now, Marvel has picked up *The Trouble With Girls* and *Captain Confederacy*. The big two should be putting out many comics in the future, giving independently-produced characters a chance for more exposure."

Those fans who remember the first run of *The Griffin* will be pleased to discover that most of the original characters, humor and feel are still there, although Vado says all of the changes made are for the better. "Our editor is Archie Goodwin and he told me to write it *my* way, the way I would have written it if we were still publishing it. The first issues have been rewritten and redrawn to my satisfaction. It's *not* a reprint and I don't want to confuse people. It's the same story, but it's better now. Hindsight is 20-20, and now I get to use it. I'm proud that it's a Slave Labor book," Vado says, "but I want people to think of it as a DC book."

New readers will be introduced (and old fans re-introduced) to a whole cast of characters, the main one being The Griffin himself, Matt Williams. "He wasn't always a personal character to me," says Vado, "but he feels that way now because I've been involved with him for so long. Ending this story was like ending a chapter in my life, but he's not an extension of me. If Matt Williams were a real person and we talked, we would probably be two guys who got along really well, who saw things in a similar way. But Matt's much more selfish as a character and as a person. He doesn't think things through and he never grew up. That's certainly not how I see myself.

"He's like those guys in high school who are captains of the football team, date the head cheerleaders and make straight A's," explains Vado. "I've found out something about those guys. They are either smart enough to realize, 'Wow, I was a real jerk in high school,' or else they cruise through life and never learn. Matt will never learn because he has never encountered anything he couldn't defeat, especially after he was made into a super guy. When he came back, he expected everyone to rush up and kiss him and say, 'Thank God you're back.' Instead, everyone was angry. This is the first time in re-

Writer Dan Vado describes *The Griffin* as a superhero book with "elements of science fiction."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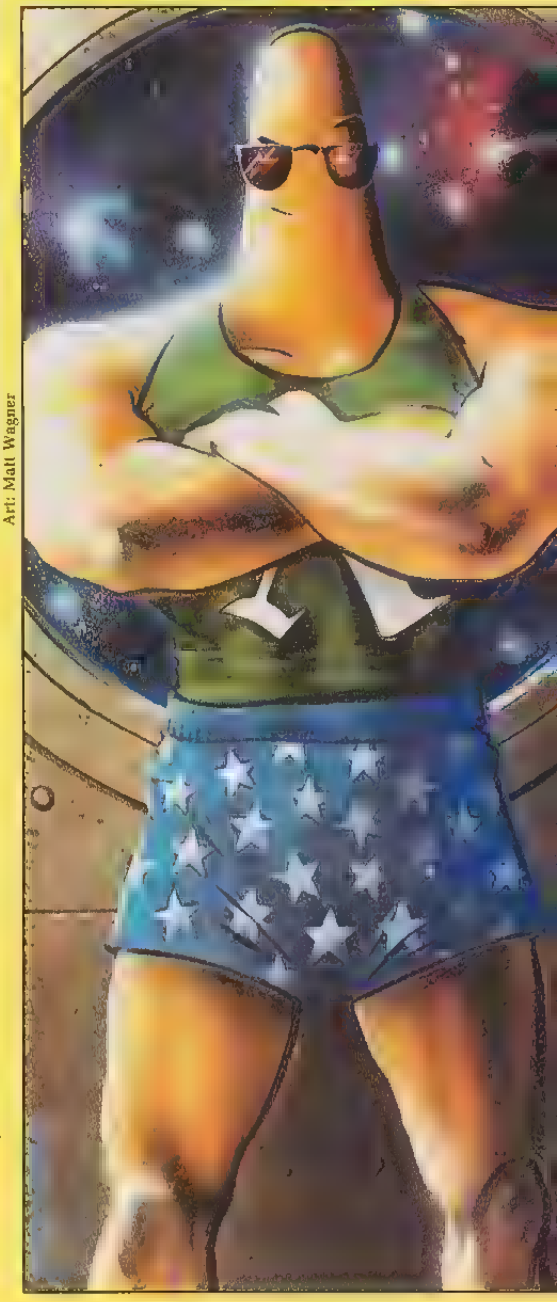
ESPECIALLY YOU, JANET I THOUGHT YOU WOULD WAIT FOR ME
WAIT FOR WHO? A DEAD MAN? YOU CAN'T JUST POP BACK IN AFTER TWENTY YEARS AND PICK UP WHERE YOU LEFT OFF!
THIS IS SO LIKE YOU MATT YOU NEVER THINK ABOUT ANYONE BUT YOURSELF
WHEN I FIRST SAW YOU I WAS HAPPY
BUT NOW I'M ANGRY BECAUSE I CAN SEE THE LAST TWENTY YEARS HASN'T CHANGED YOU A BIT YOU'RE STILL A JERK!
WELL, I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU PAL! THE WORLD DOESN'T REVOLVE AROUND YOU!

All Griffin Interior Art Norman Felchle/Mark McKenna

Despite Matt's 20-year absence from Earth, his family and friends give him a less-than-warm welcome home.

Norman Felchle says Vado originally envisioned the artist's idea of Stomu as "a three-foot guy or something."

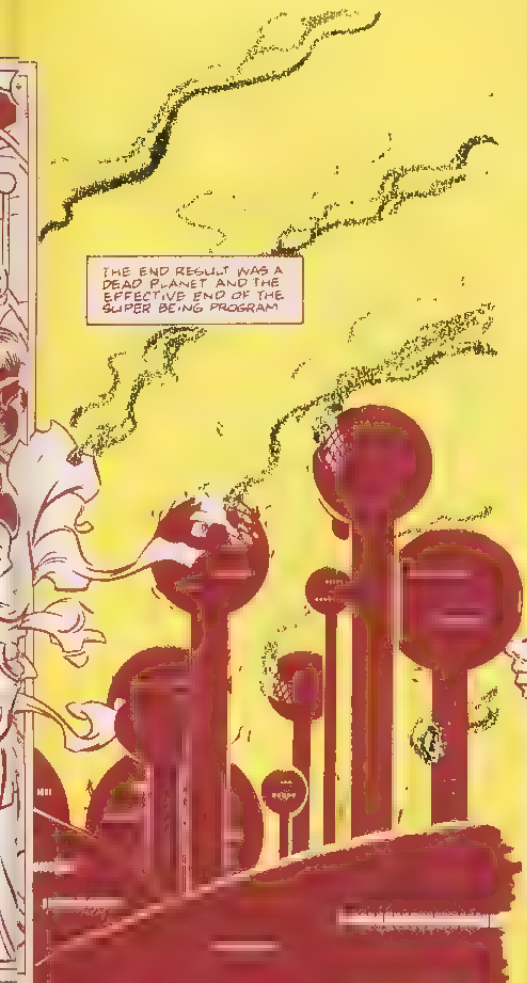


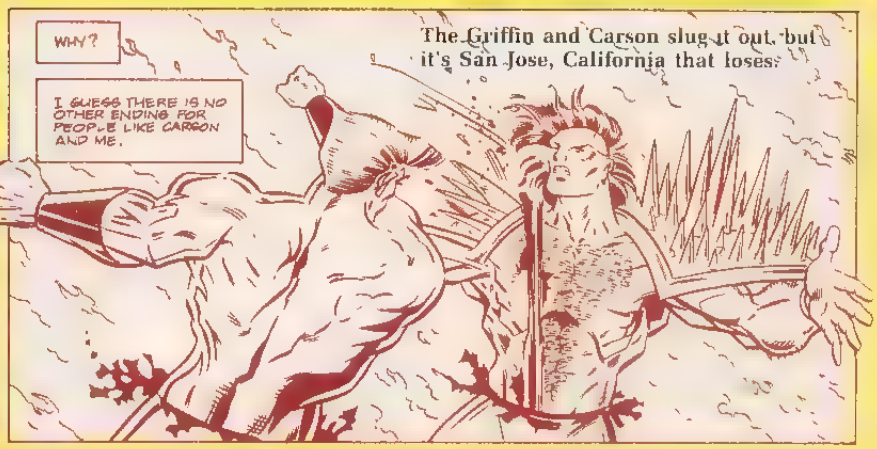
Art: Matt Wagner

cent memory that anyone has been upset with him. So, he's starting to grow up and realize that he was responsible for everything he did: A lot of family upheaval and upheaval on the planet. It's not until near the end when he realizes what he has done, says he's sorry, and people still won't let him off the hook, that he has to deal with it."

Even the symbol that Matt takes on, the griffin, came from Matt's infantile imagination rather than from an appreciation of mythology. Vado explains: "When [Matt] got recruited into the alien super-soldier thing, they allowed him to surround himself with trappings that made him feel more comfortable, and he was allowed to pick his own symbol. They were going to have these support personnel whose sole responsibility was to cater to his activities, whether it be flying him around, doing his laundry or whatever, and they all had to wear his symbol. He chose the griffin symbol from the Coors beer can. But that had to be changed because [DC] wouldn't let me mention Coors. So, now it's just 'a beer can.' The name does *sort of* come from its mythological aspect that's part of people's college courses and now promotes beer. It just goes with Matt's character that he wouldn't be able to grasp the mythological significance."

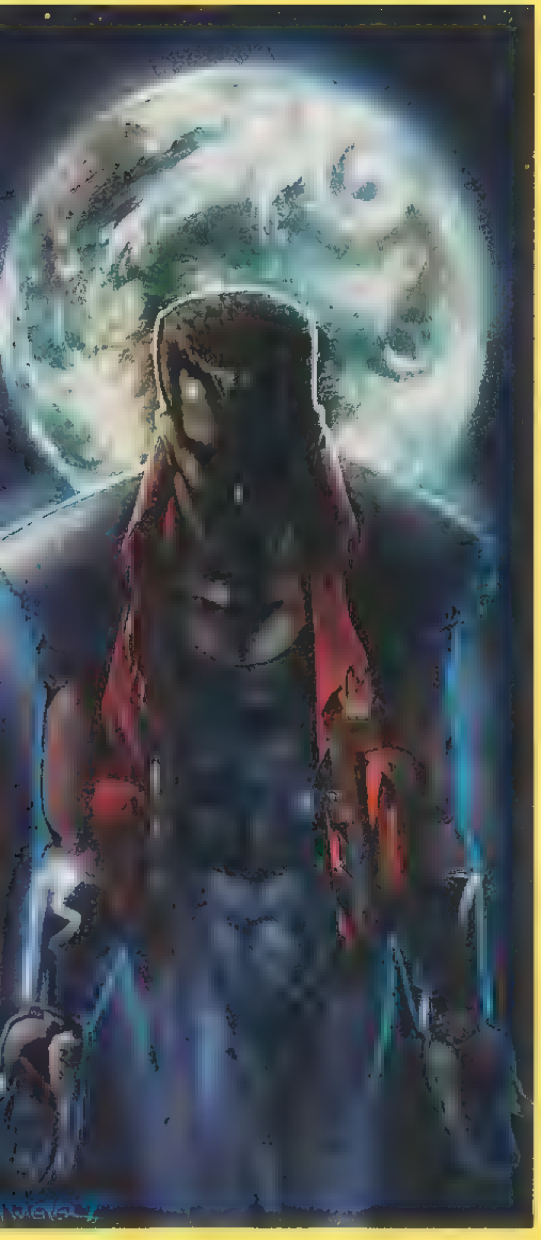
Co-creator Norman Felchle notes





The Griffin and Carson slug it out, but it's San Jose, California that loses.

Art: Matt Wagner



Matt may be sorry about the suffering he causes, but "people still won't let him off the hook," notes Vado.

and Matt's family unit—which ripped itself apart after he disappeared 20 years back—gets patched together. It's 200-plus pages of comic work, and there's something important on al most every page!

"We're not solving a mystery. We're dealing with people's personalities, seeing people change. In many comics, after a big storyline, the character is the same person he or she was six issues ago. But my characters *won't* be. They'll be different people. If you went through the intense two weeks that these characters go through, you wouldn't be the same person either. Hopefully, the readers are going to like these characters and care about the changes. That's what I'm shooting for."

As Vado speaks about the science fiction aspects of *The Griffin*, it is obvious he has worked out the entire history of these strange, yellow, oblong creatures—the Acacians in his mind. "The reality of space travel is currently beyond anyone's scope of imagination," Vado explains. "You have to suspend your belief that a technology exists so advanced that it can traverse huge expanses of space instantaneously, build huge spaceships that use artificial gravity and conquer other worlds.

"If you buy all that, yes, this is something that's real, this is the way things would be *if* technology had advanced to that point. But the whole alien culture of the Acacians [named after the Acacian tree because it's the same color as the aliens] is referred to as the empire, but it isn't. I mean, they're an empire the same way the British Empire is still an empire. I have the entire culture worked out in my head. It gets very complicated and won't show up in the book, at least at this time."

Although fans will see some new material and characters, Vado never felt a need to start the whole story over. "There's no reason to do that," he says. "This is the story that this guy went through. This is his life. There's almost nothing to start over with. This is his origin.

"The way *The Griffin* was supposed to have been done originally, as a 12-issue book series, has been turned into six issues in Prestige Format, so it's the same amount of pages. It tells that first story; it's complete. If it does well, there are other stories I can tell. If DC wanted to make *The Griffin* a regular series, it *could* be done."

New readers may be surprised to learn that The Griffin won't be a part of the DC Universe. "It wouldn't work [in the DC Universe]. The minute this guy showed up on Earth and caused this cataclysm, he would have all of the superheroes coming out to see what was going on. It might make the book sell better, but it would be more constrictive on the story."

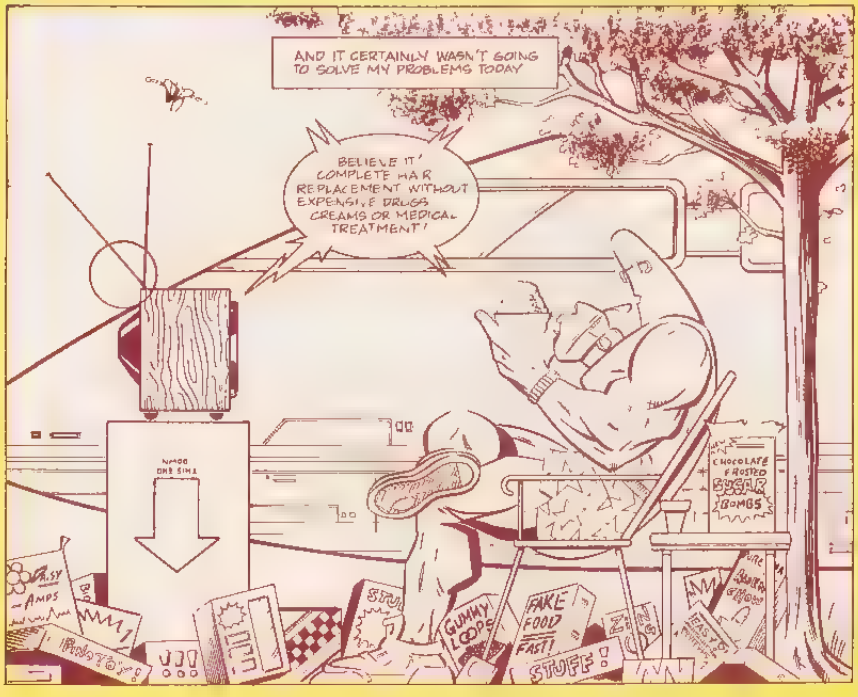
Along with Matt Williams, a whole cast of characters will be introduced. Some won't be around long. "You'll see Carson [an out-of-control Punker sent out to reclaim Matt and bring him back to the Acacians]; he's fun. There will be a

(continued on page 66)

that not only is the symbolic griffin a farce, but even Matt Williams' name has sparked some interesting results. "Dan thinks now that he unconsciously named him after Matt Williams, the third baseman for the [San Francisco] Giants. We were throwing names around, and Matt stuck. Then, we later came up with Williams. But it got Dan a call from Matt Williams' mother, which was funny."

And just so you don't think *The Griffin* is all talk and no action, plenty happens after Matt gets back to Earth, including the second-issue destruction of Vado's home town, San Jose.

"There will be two *really big* fight scenes," says Vado. "I don't want to give away too much. You're really going to see this guy come of age. A threatened alien invasion gets turned back, a major U.S. city is destroyed,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CHOCOLATE FROSTED SUGAR BOMBS
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Felchle's personality "comes through" in *Griffin* characters like Stomu.

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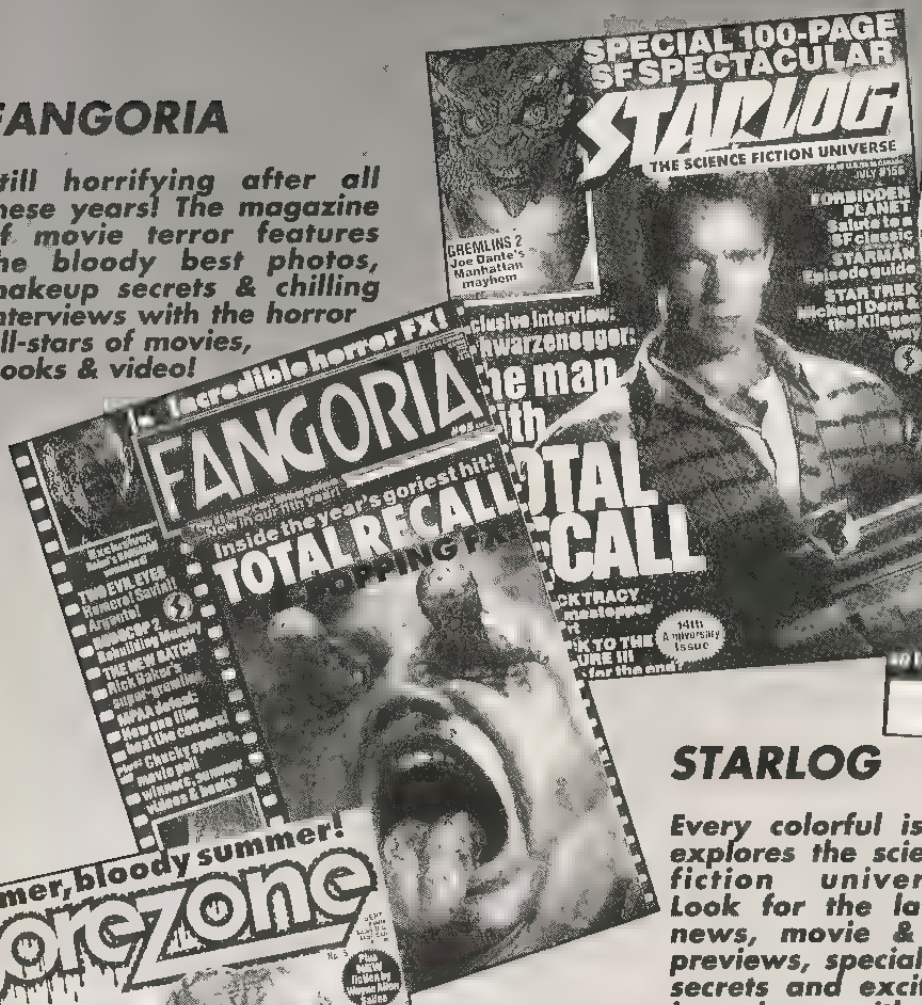

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Griffin

(continued from page 64)

female who shows up, a survivor of the world the Acacians once used for their experiments and—when those experiments got out of control—destroyed. She has ended up hiding on Earth just waiting for history to repeat itself, and it does. Then, there are Matt's family and friends who for the last 20 years thought he was dead," says Vado.

Original *Griffin* readers will also be happy to learn that Matt's big, lovable Acacian sidekick, Stomu, will return. He's destined to stay by Matt's side to the very end. "Stomu is an integral part of it. He's a creation of Norman's. It was his thought to give Matt a sidekick. Stomu's Oakland A's shirt and his love of junk products all comes from Norman," Vado explains. "When I write the character, I consider how Norman would want him to act and talk and what Norman would want him to be. Then, Norman draws him any way he feels like it."

"I wanted Matt to have a sidekick," recounts Felchle, "because Dan had this whole alien race dreamed up. Dan said, 'Sure, give him a little alien friend.' He pictured a three-foot guy or something. Instead, I drew this huge yellow guy. I gave him a not-too-serious personality, maybe lightening up something that was too serious.

"My personality especially comes through in Stomu and Carson. Not that I'm like either of them, but maybe I would be if I got drunk."

"Almost everyone is there in the end who's there in the beginning," Vado adds, "but the idea I'm having fun with is that they all change. And I would hope people would want to stick around to see them change.

"The cover art [by *Grendel* creator Matt Wagner] is going to catch people's attention," continues Vado. " DC] is counting on a lot of word-of-mouth about this really good new book. I'm flattered by that. I mean, I feel uncomfortable saying it, but I think this is a really good book or else I *wouldn't* be doing it. Its scary to think that tens of thousands of people might be reading this and going around to their friends and telling them to read it."

"The less said before someone sees the book, the better. I'm interested in what other people will think," Norman Felchle announces. "We've been working on it *forever*, and I just want it to come out so I can find out what people think of it and then go from there."

"I just hope it goes over well," says Dan Vado. "I've got a great many stories to tell, and I hope people will want to hear them." CS

Portacio

(continued from page 56)

him on the side of the good guys. That's the original dream that Charles had for the X-Men.

"Storm doesn't want him on the team because he's young and an arrogant S.O.B.," Portacio says. "There's a personality clash between him and Wolverine. Peter, to him, is the perfect guy. Physically, Colossus is everything the new character wants to be, yet he thinks that Peter is wasting his strength because he's such a nice guy. Jean, of course, will have an outlet for her mothering instincts."

Portacio frequently uses the characters' personal names, rather than their "codenames." He prefers to take a more personal approach to characterization and feels more comfortable using their first names. "I do that unconsciously with everyone but Arch[angel]. I don't know this Warren yet—he's a totally different character now. The rest of the characters I know because of *X-Factor*."

Pondering whether or not there were too many books on the market today, especially multi-titled character books, Portacio surprisingly answers, "Yes. When you have 2,000 books and two artists, no matter how much money you pay them, you won't get 2,000 good-looking books." Portacio feels that there is too little talent on the market for the number of books on sale. He also believes that with the X-books, Marvel is very fortunate to have popular artists on all the titles simultaneously. In that respect, he feels that now's the right time to expand the X-Men line. Portacio adds, "Sure, it's a big bucks move, but this is a big bucks business."

Outside of *Uncanny X-Men*, Portacio has no plans to do anything else for at least another six months. "I would like to concentrate on getting on schedule, then we'll see. I wouldn't mind working with Mike Baron again. He has been talking about a *Nexus* project. I wouldn't mind working with Steve Gerber. I don't view working with a writer as a step back for me, unless he writes a bad story. I want to write my own stories because I want to see if I can do it, but I'm not against working with other writers."

While Portacio's ultimate goal is film direction. "I like the comic genre because I can create anything I want. I can direct and control everything. Eventually, I would like to do this on film. I like to set up huge goals for myself. If you aim for the Sun but hit the Moon, is that so bad?"

Not at all no matter *what* name you use! CS

Amblin

(continued from page 48)

effect must be entirely created with an artist's pencil—frame by frame.

American Tail II contains many long scenes that play more like live action. Scenes as long as 70 or 80 feet are not unknown, and—with the sort of fluid camera work that Steven Spielberg prefers—that means the background department is producing some very long background paintings. Over on a table against one wall is a stack of background paintings that are four, six, eight, even 10 feet wide in order to cover the action during long takes—particularly in the complicated chase sequences.

"The approach," offers Wells, "is to achieve something closer to the way you would shoot a live-action movie. One of the problems with many animated movies in recent years is that they're still stuck back in the 1940s in terms of how filmmaking is done. When films like *Snow White*, *Fantasia* and *Bambi* came out, they were state of the art. It wasn't just that they were doing something technically new in animation, but they were also doing things that weren't even standard in live-action filmmaking. Now, when Spielberg looks at our storyboard layouts, he might say: 'Can you take those five shots and make then into one shot?' He will approach a scene as if he were making a movie today."

"It has been a real challenge for our layout artists," agrees Cynthia Woodbyrne, "to achieve the angles that Steven wants. One of the reasons this studio was put together is that Steven really wanted much more involvement with the animation process than he previously had. And so, every single week we put together a tape of whatever the studio has worked on—line tests, final colors, Leica-reel material for the next film—and send it to Steven. At least once a week, he calls and has a conversation with Phil and Simon about it. And he knows everything intimately—every single scene."

With the animation completed on *American Tail II: Fievel Goes West*, Simon Wells and Phil Nibblelink have begun storyboards for *Cats*, which is scheduled for release in 1994. The Zondag brothers have been brought in from the Bluth Studio to direct *We're Back* at Amblimation, a project which includes the voices of Julia Child and Walter Cronkite. Also on the boards is a musical version of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So* stories that should be finished in time for release in 1996. Altogether, they offer many great opportunities as Steven Spielberg and company explore the brave new world of Amblimation. CS

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All projects are live-action unless specified. Those marked by an asterisk (*) have changed status since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately be made.** Abbreviations: S=script; D director; P=producer; AN=animated; LA live-action; Syn syndicated; HB=Hanna-Barbera; WB=Warner Bros.; MWS Murakami Wolf Swenson; RB=Rankin Bass; WD Disney; PP=Paramount; U=Universal; Col Columbia. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 8/9/91)

The Addams Family. Film. D: Barry Sonnenfeld. S: C. Thompson, L. Wilson. Cast: Anjelica Huston, Raul Julia, Chris Lloyd. PP. November.

The Airtight Garage. AN. S: Randy Lofficier.

Aladdin. AN film. WD. '92.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel

Alley Oop. Film. Columbia.

The American. Film. P: Joel Silver. S: Mark Verheiden.

American Flagg! Film.

* **An American Tail: Fievel Goes West.** AN Sequel. Nov. (see Amblin article)

Ant-Man. Film.

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Ephron. D: J. Schumacher. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U. S: Bill Kopp.

Barbarella. TV. Nelvana

* **Barbie.** Film. Abrams/Gentile Ent. & Mattel

* **Batman.** Sequel. S: Dan Waters. D: Tim Burton. Cast: Michael Keaton, Danny DeVito, Michelle Pfeiffer. WB Summer '92. AN series, '92 on FBC.

* **Beauty & the Beast.** AN film. WD. Nov. (see article).

Beetle Bailey. Film.

Beetlejuice. AN series. ABC, video & FBC. Film sequel.

Blackhawk. Film. Amblin S: Dan Aykroyd.

Blackman. Film.

Blade. Film. S: Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin.

Blinky Bill. Australian AN film. P: Yoram Gross. '92.

Blondie. Film musical. WD S: Alfred Uhry. P: Francine LeFrak, Dean Young

James Bond. Syn AN series, *Adventures of James Bond Jr.* MWS. Fall '91.

Betty Boop. Film. D: R. Fleischer.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. '92.

* **Bucky O'Hare.** Syn AN. P: Sunbow, IDDH, Claster TV Now airing.

* **Bugs Bunny.** *Taz-Mania* spinoff (see article). *Termite Terrace.* LA/AN film. D: Joe Dante. Based on Chuck Jones' autobiography *Chuck Amuck.*

Bullwinkle. Characters join Universal Studio Tour soon. *Boris & Natasha* film.

Capitol Critters. AN series. P: S. Bochco Prod. ABC. Mid-season bow.

Captain America. Film

Captain Planet. AN series.

Casper. Film. Amblin.

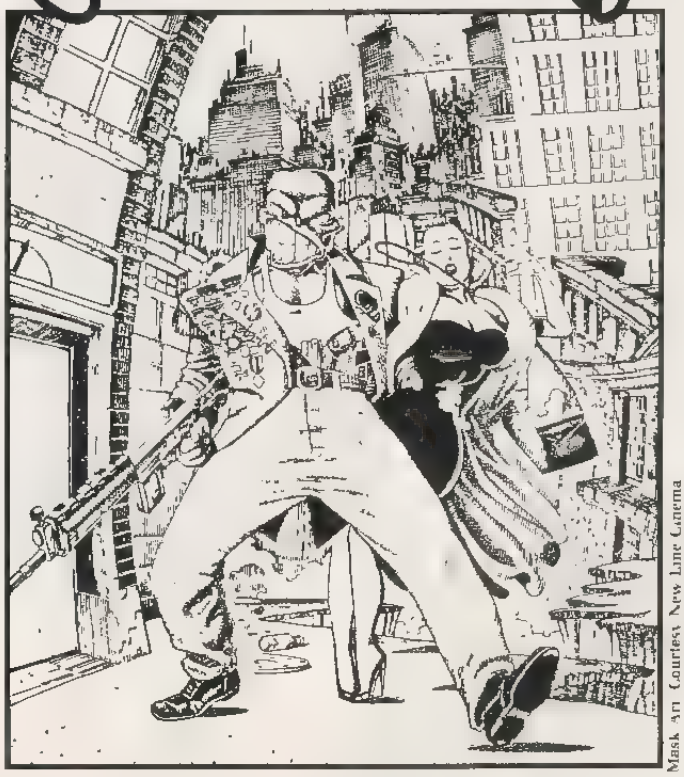
Cats. AN. Amblin. '93.

Charlie Chan. Film. Chan: B.D. Wong. D: Fred Levinson. P: G. Kirkwood, J. Hyde.

Chicken Man. AN spoof series. Calico.

City of Darkness. Film. S: Patrick Cirillo & Joe Gayton. P: M. Douglas, R. Bieber. Col

Cobalt 60. AN Film.



Mask art Courtesy New Line Cinema

New Line Cinema still hopes to film *The Mask*.

Conan. Film sequel. S: Charles Edward Pogue.

Cool World. AN/LA film. PP. D: Ralph Bakshi. Bows '92.

Danger Squad. Film. P/D: Leo Fong. W D P R Cable.

* **Darkwing Duck.** AN Syn & ABC series. (see article)

Deathlok. Film.

Defenders of Dynatron City. AN half hour. LucasArts

* **Dennis the Menace.** Film. P. John Hughes. WB

Dinosaurs for Hire. Film. S: Richard Finney & James Bonny. Fox. FX: Henson C Shop.

Dr. Strange. Film. Zoetrope. D: Alex Cox. P: F. Coppola.

Dreamwalker. CBS TV film.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. PP.

Elfquest. Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod. Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film Funnybook Films.

Family Dog. AN series. CBS P: S. Spielberg, Tim Burton, D. Klein. Mid-season bow

Far Side. AN TV

Fearless Fosdick. LA & AN TV projects. Nelvana.

* **Felix the Cat.** AN film. On video.

* **Fish Police.** AN series. HB. CBS. Mid-season. S: J. Romano

* **Fist of the North Star.** English language version of animated film due out October Streamline Pictures.

The Flintstones. Film. Fred John Goodman. D: Richard Donner. U/Amblin. AN TV film. S: J. Romano.

Garfield. AN series.

* **G.I. Joe.** Film. S: Anthony & John Gentile. WB.

Goofy. Syn AN series *Goof Troop.* WD. Bows '93

The Green Arrow. TV.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: D. Mancini. P: D. Kirschner. U.

Grimjack. Film

Gumby. Film.

Hopalong Cassidy. Film. S: G. Popper, J. Rosenthal Alligator Prods.

Human Target. Series. ABC. Mid-season Cast: Rick Springfield, Clarence Clemons. P: Danny Bilson, Paul De Meo, Lawrence Lvttle.

Inspector Gadget. LA TV series. DIC. Family Channel.

Iron Man. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. U.

The Jetsons. LA film. U.

Jo Jo. Film. P: Lee Caplin. S: Mike Chapman.

Jonny Quest. Film. U.

Judge Dredd. Film. Fox. S: H. Chaykin & J. Moore. P: C. Lippincott. For '93.

Kaanga. Film. S: (D) Geoff Edwards. S: Bernard. P: L. Caplin, B. Edwards, T. Adams.

Li'l Abner. TV. P. Max & Micheline Keller.

Little Mermaid. AN prequel TV series. For '92. WD.

* **Little Nemo.** AN film. TMS Ent./Hemdale. June '92 release.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher.

Lucky Luke. TV series. Terence Hill, star. Silvio Berlusconi Comm.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film. D: Tim Burton. S: L. Wilson, C. Thompson. P: Burton, Wilson, Denise D. Nowi. Walter Hill Carolco. "Movie musical."

Mandrake. Film.

* **The Mask.** Film. New Line.

Mr. A. Video

Mr. Magoo. Film. P: S. Tisch. AN/LA.

Mr. X. Film. P: Jim Cash & Jack Epps Jr.

Monster in My Pocket. AN series/LA film. Pacific Rights.

Mother Goose & Grimm. AN series. CBS. Film Roman. Lee Mendelson Prod. Fall '91.

Nancy. Film. P: P. Muller.

Negative Man. Bob Kane

Art: Simon Bisley/Courtesy DC Comics
Batman Trademark & Copyright 1991 DC Comics

Judge Dredd: Copyright 1991 Fleetway Publications

Batman meets Judge Dredd in this fall's *Judgment on Gotham*. Meanwhile, filming begins on the second *Batman* movie. The long-planned *Judge Dredd* film is targeted for a 1993 release.

hero. LA series. Nelvana.

Neil the Horse. AN/LA.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Film. S: Greg Pruss.

Joe Palooka. Musical.

* **Paparazzi Samurai.** AN TV series. P: DIC, Abrams/Gentile.

The Phantom. Film. P: B. Sherlock, P. Sjoquist, J. Torv, R. Price. S: Ken Shadie. Lee Falk, con. D: Simon Wincer.

Pico & Columbus. AN film. Bavaria Film.

Pirates of Dark Water. AN series. ABC. HB. Bows fall.

Power Pack. TV pilot. S: Jason Brett. New World & Paragon Ent.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Amblin.

* **Prince Valiant.** AN series. Family Channel. (see article)

The Prowler. Film. Funnybook Films.

The Punisher. Sequel.

Radio Boy. AN. RB.

Reid Fleming. Film. S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin.

RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). For '92.

Roger Rabbit. Prequel film. *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit.* D: Rob Minkoff. New short "Hare in My Soup."

Rogue Trooper. Film.

The Saint. Film. S: Terry Hayes. D: Renny Harlin. P: Robert Evans. PP.

Scooby Doo. Film. WB.

Secret Agent X-9. AN film.

Sgt. Preston. TV revival.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. WB.

The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. U.

The She-Hulk. Film. S/D: Larry Cohen. B. Nielsen.

The Silver Surfer. Film.

The Simpsons. AN. FBC.

Speed Racer. Film. S: Peter Lenkov. P: J. Silver. WB.

Spider-Man. Stage musical. S & lyrics: B. Harman. Music: K. Herrmann. EXP: Stan Lee. D: J. Nash, J. Calamari.

Starwatcher. Film. Computer AN. P: Alain Guiot/Videosystem. S: Moebius (D) & J. Fryzman.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox & Funnybook Films. S: Will Jacobs & Gerard Jones. P: M. Pepler, N. Tabachnick.

Ultraman. 13 new half-hour TV episodes. Shot in English.

Valentina. TV series. Dementra Hampton. Reteitalia.

Vampirella. Film. S/D: Jim Wynorski.

V for Vendetta. Film. WB. S: Hilary Henkin.

WARP. Film. S/P: Mark Victor & Michael Grais.

Watchmen. Film. P: J. Silver. D: T. Gilliam.

We're Back. AN film. Amblin London/U. For '92.

Why I Hate Saturn. TV.

* **Wizard of Id.** Film. Cinergi. John Hughes *may* join project.

Wolverine. Film.

The X-Men. Film. Carolco. P: Jim Cameron. AN 5-ep mini-series. FBC. Marvel P.

Yogi Bear. *Yo! Yogi.* AN TV series. HB. NBC. Fall '91.

* **Young Robin Hood.** AN series. HB. Fall '91.

Zen. Film. AN series.

Zorro. Film. D: Steven Spielberg. S: Nancy Larson. Tri-Star. TV series. Family Chan.

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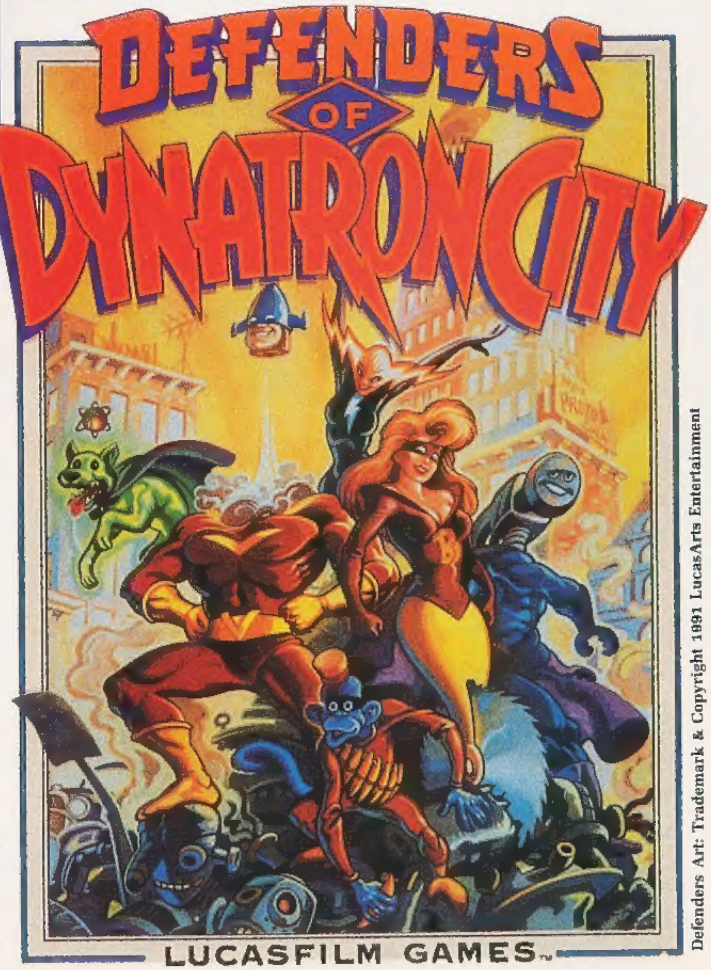
Lucasfilm Games' *Defenders of Dynatron City* will become an animated TV special.



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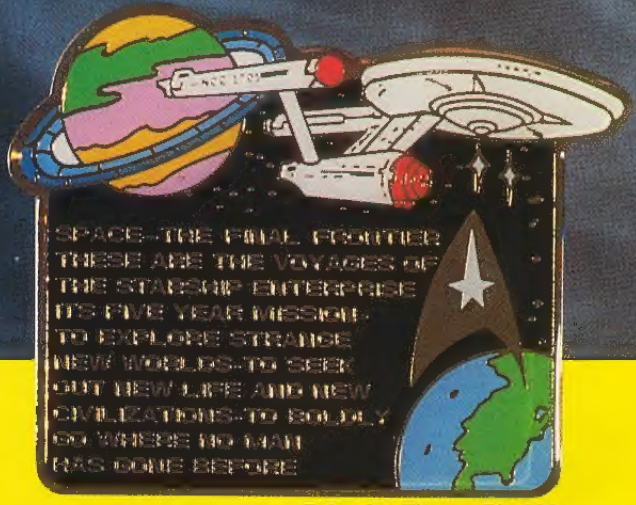

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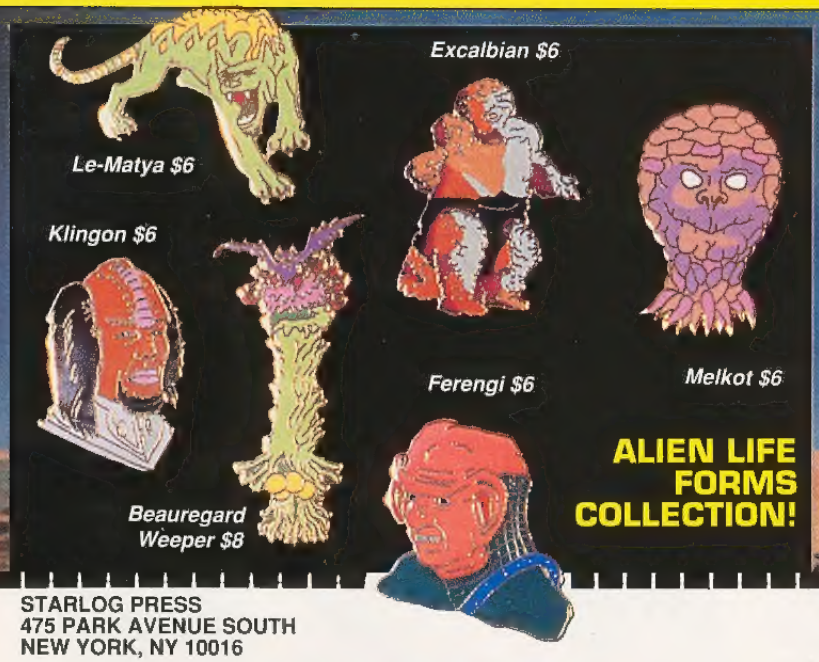

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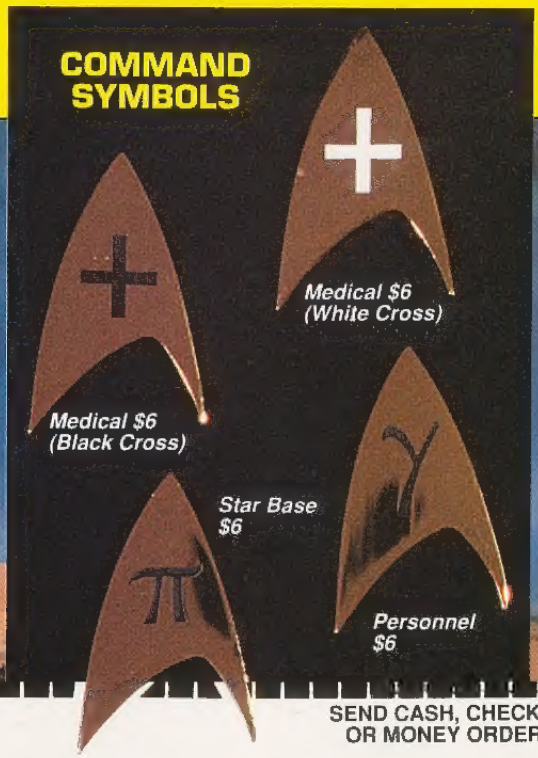

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